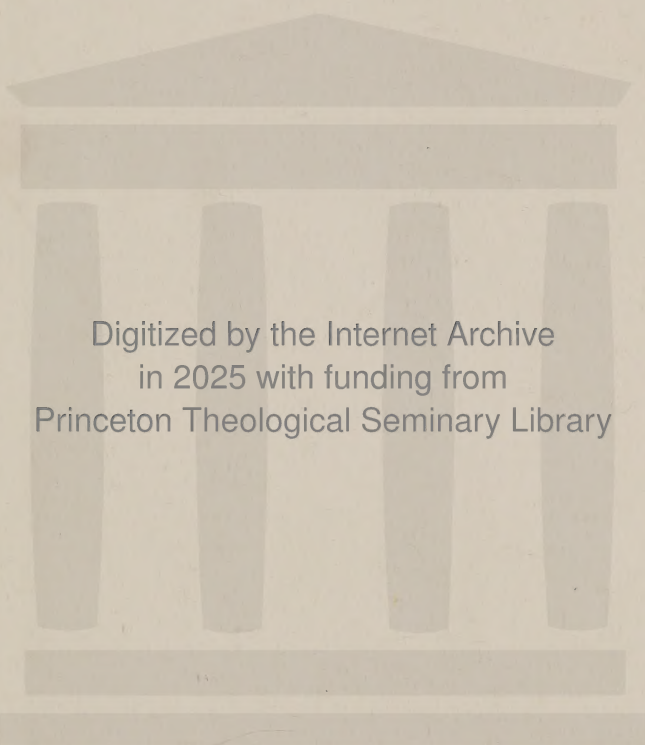


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THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

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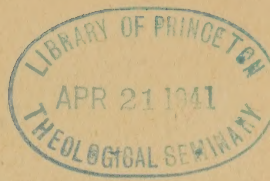
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THE DEVELOPMENT
OF
RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

ATTAINMENT OF THE THEORY AND ACCOMMODATIONS IN THOUGHT
AND INSTITUTIONS (1640-1660)

by

W. K. JORDAN, PH.D.

*Associate Professor of History
in the
University of Chicago*

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WOKING

TO
ELIJAH JORDAN

P R E F A C E

This volume, the fourth of the series, completes the study of the development of religious toleration in England during the tumultuous yet fruitful era that extends from the beginning of the Reformation to the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The volume should be regarded as complementary to the third of the series, which undertook to consider religious toleration as a political issue during the revolutionary decades (1640-1660) and to examine the structure of Puritan and moderate sectarian thought during that period. The present volume is particularly concerned with the development of lay thought during the revolutionary era and with the chastening effect of adversity upon the conservative religious communions, Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. The conclusion seeks briefly to assess the causes for and the nature of the momentous changes that occurred in English thought during the period examined in the four volumes.

The theory of religious toleration stood substantially complete in 1660. We may believe that responsible opinion in England was by that date persuaded of the necessity, if not of the positive virtue, of religious freedom. Despite the bitterness of reaction during the early years of the Restoration, the discussion, now mature in theory, was transferred to the forum of political consideration. Delicate institutional accommodations had still to be made before England gained peace, stability, and a larger freedom as the fruit of her long travail. Religious liberty was to undergird not only parliamentary government but that temper of mind which we denominate liberal by teaching men invaluable lessons in the art of living peacefully together in a complex society. It stands as the symbol of a momentous cultural gain,—as the symbol for ideals of freedom, justice, and decency of human relationships which, as these lines are written, appear to be under formidable and ruthless attack. We may hope that the virtue, the quiet strength, and the tenacity of idealism which animated the moderates of an earlier century may lend courage and dignity of resolution to

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

those whom history has charged in a later century with the defence of the fragile vessel of freedom.

In thinking back over the twelve years that have elapsed since this work was begun, the writer is deeply conscious of many obligations which he can never hope fully to repay. But he can at least acknowledge his indebtedness to the great pioneers in the history of thought, Buckle, Hallam, Tulloch, Lecky, Lea and the others, who originally inspired him, to the scholars who trained and encouraged him, and to the colleagues who have since assisted him in so many ways. The author is under special debt to Miss Marie Edel of Wellesley College and to Miss Madeleine Rowse of Smith College who, as colleagues, have lent such invaluable assistance in preparing the four volumes for the press. The Harvard University Committee on Research in the Social Sciences has generously assisted in the completion of the entire work. The Social Science Research Council, by a generous grant-in-aid, assisted in the completion of this volume and the bibliography for the entire series.

W. K. J.

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August 1939

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

I

THE LAYMEN AND THE MODERATES

A. GENERAL NATURE OF LAY THOUGHT, 1640-1660

The revolutionary period witnessed the triumph of the lay spirit in England. We have previously observed that an important body of lay thought had been developing in England which had embraced the principles of religious toleration and which was disposed to wrest from the hands of a divided clergy the solution of the complex problems of the settlement of religion and the treatment of dissent.¹ The outbreak of civil war had the immediate effect of intensifying religious conflict within the realm, of loosing for the time being the destructive forces of fanaticism and sectarian intolerance. The cool and reasoned persuasions of moderate counsels were for the moment engulfed by a tide of religious extremism. It was again demonstrated that war and the fanaticisms which undergird it are destructive to the slow but constructive processes by which reasonable and moderate men seek to solve the problems that confront mankind. Those months when a Presbyterian minority held Parliament in its grip by the threat of Scottish arms, when the Westminster Assembly was raising stone upon stone the grim structure of another exclusive church, were evil days for religious liberty in England. The defection of the great moderates—men like Chillingworth, Falkland, and Hales—from the parliamentary cause had been vindicated by the course of historical events. Spiritual liberty gained nothing if the ruin of Laud was to be followed by the triumph of the Westminster Divines.

¹ Jordan, W. K., *Development of Religious Toleration, etc.*, I (L., 1932), 300-303; II (L., 1936), 315-319.

It was speedily demonstrated, however, that the revolutionary coalition could retain effective cohesion only so long as it based the Civil War and the settlement which it was endeavouring to effect upon the principles of religious toleration. No other constitution could unite the sects for the prosecution of the war; no other administrative policy could secure the acquiescence of the large body of lay thought necessary for the preservation of peace once the war had been won. The Cromwellian Settlement, though not without Puritan characteristics, must be regarded as a lay solution to the religious problem in England. During a period of about twenty years clerical prestige had suffered defeats from which it was never fully to recover: the Anglo-Catholic definition of the exclusive church had been violently renounced, the Genevan determinations of the Assembly were repudiated at the moment of their pronouncement, and the claims of the extremist sects were quickly condemned by the intelligence of the nation as socially destructive and as a violation of the tendencies of national religious development.

The lay spirit had triumphed in England and from the time of John Lilburne and Oliver Cromwell its domination of the religious structure has never been relaxed. We shall indicate that there were in the revolutionary era many shadings of lay thought, men of radically different religious opinions must be included in our discussion, though certain commonly and stubbornly entertained convictions may be regarded as characteristic of the secular mind. Most importantly, there can be no doubt that by the time of the Restoration the lay mind was finally convinced of the futility of persecution and of the necessity, whether upon religious, social, economic, or political grounds, of toleration. Men had arrived at this important and common conviction by the laborious ascent of a variety of ways, but it was even as early as 1660 almost axiomatically entertained by the lay mind. Two generations of bitter and destructive warfare on the Continent and a generation of fratricidal struggle in England had, after a terrible toll in the coin of blood and civilization, left the balance between Catholic and Protestant, between sect and sect, practically unchanged. Men were at last persuaded by the harsh tuition of history that

THE LAYMEN AND THE MODERATES

persecution could never achieve its announced purposes.¹ The disillusionment that followed the age of faith in Europe expressed itself in a number of mental and moral attitudes, but it was rooted in the conviction that neither the state nor organized religion could long survive unless tolerance were imposed upon the warring factions, each of which had sought to arrogate to itself the title of Christian.

The lay mind, toughened by disillusionment, was becoming harder and more sceptical. A profound indifference was slowly beginning to settle like a damp spreading fog which was destined to quench the fires of fanaticism that had so recently laid waste the civilization of Europe. Men were turning from theology to science and philosophy. The percentage of books and pamphlets on theological topics, which had loomed so large in the decade of the Civil War, shows a sharp diminution in the decade beginning in 1650 and a startling decline in the first decade of the Restoration.² New currents of thought were stirring restlessly: the human mind was probing eagerly and with complete absorption into new and mundane spheres of knowledge, and the statistics on trade as well as the multiplying treatises on commerce and economics testify that the commercial revolution was at hand. The age of faith was all but past in England.

B. THE LATITUDINARIANS AND THE MODERATES

The great school of Latitudinarians, which gained its spiritual inspiration from the matchless character of Falkland and its intellectual leadership from the profound mind of Chillingworth, had just prior to the Civil War framed for England one of the most noble and capacious conceptions of the Church that Christian theory has ever evolved. While firmly rooted in

¹ Smith, Preserved, *A History of Modern Culture* (N.Y., 1930), I, 483.

² An effort was made to determine the actual percentage of theological works by samples of 1000 items from each decade (using the Thomason Catalogue, the Gay Catalogue [Harvard University], the Huntington Catalogue, and the Mc Alpin Catalogue). In the decade 1640-1649, 44.2 % of the total number of items published were religious in character; 1650-1659, 34.5 %; and in the first decade of the Restoration period, 29.8 %. These data are of course only roughly accurate.

the tradition of Christian Humanism, while not uninfluenced by the Arminian movement in Holland, the Latitudinarians had maintained a substantial identity and had sought to provide a characteristically English solution to an English religious problem. These great moderates were rationalistic in their approach, Christian in their philosophy, and tolerant in their thought and actions. As moderates they were unwilling to embrace either of the vigorous extremisms which were pushing England to the brink of war and as theorists they were unwilling seriously to compromise the noble and tolerant ideal by which they defined Christian life. The war dealt cruelly with them and for the moment the waves of fanaticism were all but to engulf the enduring foundation which they had laid for English religious thought.¹

The daring thought of these men had swept beyond the theological narrowness of both sides in the titanic religious struggle of the mid-seventeenth century to grasp firmly the idea of a comprehensive and tolerant Church. They saw and preached that the true Church is founded upon morality and is girded by irrefutable verities of faith; they denounced as unworthy and as unchristian the divisive preoccupation with ritual, with form, and with narrow sectarian principles.² At the same time, they were deeply persuaded that this lofty ideal of the Christian Church could be attained only in an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual charity. Their fine confidence in the power of truth, "their ceaseless struggle against the empire of prejudice, their comprehensive views of the laws and limits of the reason, their fervent passionate love of knowledge, and the majesty and dignity of their sentiments, all produced in England a tone of thought that was essentially opposed to persecution."³ The line of thought which the moderates had established was never to be broken even by the bitter intolerance of civil war.

The philosophy of moderation gains its ultimate vindication

¹ For a fuller discussion of the thought and influence of this group, *vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 349-421.

² Tulloch, John, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England, etc.* (L. and Edinburgh, 1872), II, 2-3.

³ Lecky, W. E. H., *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism, etc.* (L., 1865). II. 79-80.

when it is called upon to bind the wounds which war and violence have left upon the body of institutions and the structure of culture. Falkland and Chillingworth died with the desolate conviction that the philosophy which they had offered as the cure for the spiritual conflicts of England had been finally repudiated. Yet, as we have observed, when the task of reconstruction was begun, when the framing of the Cromwellian Establishment was undertaken, the only formula that afforded peace and health for England owed very much indeed to the majestic and capacious architecture of the Latitudinarians. We have already noticed that the stubborn insistence of the sects upon the principle of religious liberty drew its philosophical sustenance from the moderate tradition. But it was in the lay thought of the period that we find the humanistic tradition most precisely and purely perpetuated. Men of every camp and of every religious persuasion were driven by the despair that followed the reign of the sects and the ruin that accompanied the Civil War to grasp firmly and resolutely the principles of comprehension and toleration so eloquently enunciated by the Latitudinarians a decade previously.

1. SIR SIMONDS D'EWES, 1602-1650

The great historian of Parliament, Sir Simonds D'Ewes,¹ reflects very clearly the moderate point of view which, typically

¹ D'Ewes was a member of an old and influential Dorset family. He was carefully educated before his matriculation at Cambridge and had already acquired Puritan inclinations. His father, who neither understood nor sympathized with his son's scholarly interests, removed him from Cambridge before he had taken his degree to enter him at the Middle Temple. D'Ewes was admitted to the bar in 1623, but from the beginning of his career displayed far greater aptitude for legal and historical research than for the practice of his profession. He was an intimate in the learned circle of which Sir Robert Cotton was the greatest luminary (Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 475-488). D'Ewes married a rich heiress in 1626 and shortly thereafter retired to Islington, where he was able to prosecute his antiquarian studies without distraction. Returned to the Long Parliament, he very quickly became alarmed at the intemperance of the Puritan extremists and embraced a thoroughly moderate position. His dissatisfaction with the religious policy proposed by the Presbyterians and his careful criticism of the political radicalism of the parliamentary majority brought him under increasing suspicion. He was expelled from the House in 1648 and died two years thereafter.

with him, was firmly grounded upon the experience of history. Though a Puritan by training and sympathy, D'Ewes found himself unable to lend enthusiastic support to a civil war which he predicted would engender political ruin and religious anarchy. He was alarmed and disturbed by the fissures that were quickly opened in the House of Commons, of which he was a distinguished member, directly the question of religion reached the floor and was appalled by the divisions which rent the realm asunder once the standards of war were unfurled. As a moderate he had no stomach for the war and in late 1642 emerged as a leader of the influential group in the Commons which pleaded for negotiations with the king in order to find some formula that would spare the land and its institutions from the ravages of civil conflict.¹ He was equally perturbed by the amazing spread of the sects during these chaotic months, though he was not ensnared, as were so many of the moderate Puritans, by the plea of the Assembly that it alone could preserve Christian society in England from destruction. D'Ewes feared the tyranny of the Presbyterians quite as much as he had disliked the rigidity of the Laudian prelates. Essentially an Elizabethan in his political and religious philosophy, he desired a broad and comprehensive church in which all reasonable men could unite, yet a church of sufficient strength and institutional discipline to stay the process of disintegration which he held to be implicit in sectarianism.

D'Ewes published in 1645 his *Primitive practise for preserving truth*, a work which has been too little noticed in forming an estimate of the historian's thought and career. The book, which was probably written in first draft in 1637 or 1638, was essentially a latitudinarian attack upon the doctrines of persecution and enforced conformity. Carefully based upon historical arguments, the essay proceeds with a biting analysis to explore the psychology and the destructive principles which characterize every persecuting system.

We may take it as axiomatic, D'Ewes argues, that it is the mark of the antichristian church to persecute, of the Christian Church to endure persecution. Christ has taught us to judge churches by this criterion, and history has in every instance

¹ *Harl. MSS.*, clxiv, 270b, 334.

confirmed Him. Thus the Romanists have consistently embraced the doctrine of persecution as a tenet of their faith and have sought with every bloody means at their disposal to extirpate truth. Unhappily, this stigma of the antichrist has likewise been branded upon many of the Protestant churches as well. Religion has been made the toy of princes, and men have been compelled to change their faith in accordance with the whim of political circumstance.¹ The Protestants have shown themselves quite as eager to wield the sword of persecution as have the Roman Catholics whom they so violently condemn for cruelty and irreligion.

It is difficult to say precisely how the impious practice of persecution insinuated itself into Christian doctrine and thinking, but one thing may certainly be said, no justification for it can be found in the Bible. The primitive Church imposed no harsher penalty than exile upon unquestioned heretics and "did always abhorre the shedding of blood in matters that merely concern religion."² In its purest days the Church required no more than adherence to a simple statement of creed, to which successive ages and churches have added prescriptive glosses and pompous definitions on matters that God has left uncertain. Heresy has been narrowly defined and cruelly treated, despite the fact that Christ has specifically told us that we can do no more than arrange that the heretics "be instructed, reprov'd, and discountenanced, and if they prove irrecoverably obstinate, exiled."³

The tolerance which was characteristic of the early Church was perverted, D'Ewes alleged, by the Roman Church, which sought to replace a spiritual dominion by temporal mastery. In so doing it separated itself from the truth of Christ, since "it is not for Christians, but for pagans and infidells, who know not the way of instruction, to propagate their gentillisme and idolatry by fire and sword."⁴ Persecution became the brutish weapon of carnal men who have rarely exhibited affection even for the religion which they pretend to uphold.⁵ The moderate and pious men of the Catholic Church have steadily protested

¹ D'Ewes, Sir Simonds, *The primitive practise for preserving truth, etc.* (L., 1645), 2-3.

² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

against the scourge of blood which has been the consequence of the vain attempt to extirpate heresy. And well may they protest, for it is "neither warranted by the practice of the primitive church, nor consonant to reason, policie, or the property of the true church, to kill an heretique by a long and noysome imprisonment, or to adjudge and put him to a violent death."¹ Rome stands condemned as antichristian because her pious members have been unable to rid her of the deadly virus of persecution, and, quite as certainly, those Protestant Churches that have grasped the cudgels of persecution have arrayed themselves in the camp of those who levy war on Christ.

Every record of history should convince us of the futility and danger of persecution, just as the scriptures so plainly testify to its iniquity. The wisest princes have ever declined to raise the cross of persecution and to plunge their realms into a civil war which would serve only the ambitions of arrogant clerics. France and Germany have learned after bitter experience that a modern nation cannot long endure unless it founds its policy upon religious freedom. Venice will "indure no inquisitors in matters of religion, nor if any of their subjects be accused of heresie, doe they suffer it to be questioned before any of the clergy alone, who are thirsty after bloud, but before them joyntly together with their civill judges."² Europe has been torn by terrible wars of religion which have surely persuaded all sane men of the futility and positive danger to human society inherent in religious intolerance. Sheer necessity requires us to accept the principle of toleration.

Nor is that all. Charity and reason likewise inform us of the awful error of punishing heresy by death. When we destroy an heretic we act as the devil's agent in the furthering of his impious purposes. For it is obvious that if the heretic is cut down in his sin we have assumed responsibility for the eternal destruction of his soul. If the system of repression which the orthodox envisage is effective, we are certain through the awful pressure of fear to force countless men to a formal confession of a faith which they neither understand nor believe. In either case intolerance accomplishes nothing else than the destruction of souls and the perversion of true religion. It

¹ D'Ewes, *Primitive practise*, 47.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

enjoys no support from the Bible, from the practice of the primitive church, from the tuition of history, or from the dictates of charity and reason.

Since Europe has been divided into several faiths by the Reformation, another factor of the utmost importance has arisen which requires the adoption of a policy of toleration. Spiritual differences have become so fundamental and so deep-seated that they cannot be extirpated save at the cost of a war which may well destroy both religion and the state. Wise and prudent men have become persuaded after a century of harrowing experience that the very requirements of sovereignty compel nations to embrace religious freedom.

D'Ewes's defence of toleration as a necessity of state was cogent and effective. Religious persecution weakens the foundations of a state since force and violence simply diffuse the evil which compulsion seeks to eradicate. It is historically evident, for example, that the execution of Servetus and the many severities laid against the Anabaptists had no other effect than to ensure the dissemination of two dangerous heresies. The bloodshed of Mary's reign "facilitated the way for her royall sister Elizabeth to restore the truth at an easie rate."¹ The death of Hus kindled a fire that swept over all of Central Europe and was never completely extinguished. History has abundantly demonstrated that any man who dies a martyr dies assured that his views, whether true or false, have gained perpetuity. The wise prince will avoid the terrible risk of kindling a conflagration which may well consume his throne as well as his church. He will realize that a conscience that has been persuaded "by instruction and information to embrace and beleieve any opinions, though hereticall, and therefore much more the truth it selfe, can never be driven from them, but by the same meanes of a further and more cleare instruction."² A man who believes his faith to be founded upon a knowledge of God and to be sanctified by His grace can never be compelled by the arm of the prince or the thunder of the church to forsake that faith. No state will risk its own destruction by attempting to assail the impregnable rock of the human conscience.

¹ D'Ewes, *Primitive practise*, 15.

² *Ibid.*, 16.

The great tragedy of the sixteenth century, D'Ewes maintained, was the dedication of the civil sword to a futile and impious effort to stay the hand of God. Charles V was the most powerful monarch in the world until his might was broken by a vain attempt to suppress the Lutheran heresy. He died with the realization that the Holy Roman Empire had been dissolved as a consequence of his own stubborn resolution to break the back of heresy. His son poured the treasure and man-power of Spain into a crusade against heresy, and in the end Spain was ruined and Protestantism stood stronger than before. The royal house in France laid the realm in waste, raised the black spectre of desperate rebellion, and destroyed itself to discover that the Huguenots had emerged a strong and cohesive party powerful enough to dictate the terms of peace.¹ These have been lessons in statecraft learned at an awful cost. Europe has surely been persuaded by exhaustion, if not by reason, of the futility and danger inherent in religious persecution.

D'Ewes wrote as a scholar who was impressed by the tragedy of the religious wars and as a moderate who feared that England was to suffer the same fate that had overwhelmed France and Germany. Though an orthodox Calvinist in his personal religious views, he was persuaded that diversity could not be suppressed and that the true faith must establish its leadership by the spiritual weapons with which Christ had armed it. He took it to be axiomatic that persecution has no place in the true Church and, proceeding from this position, employed the weight of his logic to demonstrate the fact that religious intolerance had become politically and socially suicidal in the Europe of his day. It may well be that the sharp yet sober judgment of practical men like the great parliamentary diarist cut more deeply into the massive cliffs of traditional opinion than did the fervent and occasionally hysterical pleas of the persecuted sectaries.

2. SAMUEL HARTLIB, *d.* 1670

The same moderation which D'Ewes had counselled received warm support from the pen of the volatile and versatile Samuel

¹ D'Ewes, *Primitive practise*, 17-30.

Hartlib. Hartlib was a man of omnivorous interests and dozens of enthusiasms, each of which in turn was in his view destined to save England if not Europe. A friend of Milton, an amateur politician, a publisher and writer, this interesting man wrote with equal facility on banking, bee-keeping, colonization, husbandry and education. A friend and supporter of John Dury, the self-appointed apostle of Protestant reunion,¹ Hartlib approached the subject of religious toleration with an inexhaustible fund of good sense and good nature. Persecution, Hartlib maintained, was as ineffectual as it was perilous and was still another symptom of the inherited ignorance which he was assailing upon a score of fronts. His thought upon this and other subjects was not systematic, his writing bears the marks of haste and misinformation, and there are curious contradictions in his philosophy. But he wrote vigorously, his works enjoyed a wide circulation, and his sweeping assumption that all reasonable and "modern" men were tolerant could not have been without considerable effect upon his generation.

The magistrate, Hartlib argued, had for too long been the dupe of an arrogant and selfish clergy. The state has been involved in a cause which does not concern it, and by lending its support to religious coercion has endangered its own safety and has delayed the progress of the reformation. This is not to say that the magistrate has no duty in religious matters, but his charge must not be extended beyond the limits which Christianity imposes. The state should not permit overt attacks upon religion and it should protect and encourage the public ministry. But even more important is its duty to ensure that a "just liberty of conscionable profession be not denied to such as walke orderly in the things wherein they differ from others about religion."² It may lend support to the national church of the land, but it must at the same time make sure that this church does not become an engine of tyranny which seeks to crush those sects which find it necessary to embrace dissent. The state, in other words, should place itself above the quarrels

¹ *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 255-257, 364-370.

² [Hartlib, Samuel], *Considerations tending to the happy accomplishment of England's reformation in church and state* (L., 1647), 23-24.

of the sects and should afford to every peaceful conscience the opportunity to seek truth freely.

Persecution derives itself from passion and arrogance. Men who cannot convince others by good reasons resort to violence in order to secure the triumph of their wills. The peace and dignity of the Church has been shattered by the most bitter quarrels over matters of either slight or doubtful consequence. In his reply to Edward's *Antapologia*, Hartlib argued that the quarrel between the Presbyterians and Independents was concerned with obscure matters of church government into which "many quick-sighted men are prying . . . yet cannot find it out." Christians must eschew passion in all questions that divide them and cling as closely as possible to the clear mandates of the Bible. Arrogance and coercive pressure will neither cure heresy nor advance the cause of truth, and "that man is not fit to be a champion for truth, who cannot answer some adversaries with silence, and master sturdy and boysterous arguments upon his knees."¹

Indeed, it may well be that in seeking to crush out diversity we oppose our puny intelligence to the purposes of Almighty God. Religious differences seem to be ordered by God, who "maketh crosse wils, crosse lines, and crosse wayes, serve His will, and come direct to His line."² It is high presumption indeed for fallible humanity to assume that it can better order the design of God than He who created mankind. God is infinitely patient with mankind and seems content with the progress of His truth in this world. We may consequently rest assured that He will bring unity and peace to the Church when He so wills it. So long as men are content to seek earnestly for truth rather than for victory they will accomplish their own salvation and advance the cause of the Church of Christ.³

It is tragic that the Reformation, so recently begun, has foundered upon the fatal rocks of pride and intolerance. Protestantism is divided and torn by intestinal wars in the face of the danger of a determined and united Rome. Unity and tolerance may be attained when the several Protestant com-

¹ Hartlib, S., and Woodward, H., *A short letter modestly intreating a friends judgement upon Mr Edwards his booke, etc.* (L., 1644), 15.

² *Ibid.*, 20.

³ *Ibid.*, 22-25.

munions unite upon a common confession which comprehends the basic and undisputed truths of the Christian faith.¹ The spiritual catholicity of Christianity was so obvious to the lay intelligence of the impatient Hartlib that he dismissed almost contemptuously the differences that divided the warring religious factions of his day. Hartlib's view extended beyond Independency and, for that matter, England; he envisaged a European Protestantism, united upon those principles which the Latitudinarians had declared to constitute the essence of Christianity, that would extend toleration to those eccentric fanatics who insisted upon reducing into particulars that which the Bible and common intelligence declared simple and general. The lay intelligence which was wresting the solution of the religious problem from the clergy was making a shambles of the magnificent but complicated structure of Protestant theology which had been so laboriously and painfully built. Though this fact boded ill for institutional Christianity, it was to be intimately connected with the triumph of religious toleration in Western Europe.

3. FRANCIS ROUS, 1579-1659

Lay thought in England was deeply exercised by the threat which the Westminster Assembly raised against Christian freedom and was rapidly losing the conviction that any system of enforced uniformity could be imposed unless the nation was willing to tolerate perpetual religious and civil strife. Powerful and representative sections of opinion were persuaded that religious toleration afforded the only foundation upon which domestic peace could be established—a point of view which Cromwell sought to enlist in the support of the comprehensive Establishment which he had envisaged. The Moderates lent unwavering devotion to this position and powerfully implemented the growing conviction that a broad and unconditional freedom must be extended by the state to all those Christian sects that worshipped peacefully and conducted themselves with reasonable propriety.

¹ [Hartlib, Samuel], *The necessity of some nearer conjunction and correspondence amongst evangelicall Protestants, etc.* (L., 1644), 2-7.

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

The most significant work of the moderate group appeared as early as 1645, a book, indeed, which must be regarded as one of the half dozen most important contributions ever made to the development of the theory of religious toleration in England. This work, *The ancient bounds, or liberty of conscience, tenderly stated, modestly asserted, and mildly vindicated*, may be tentatively ascribed to a leading member of Parliament, Francis Rous.¹ Educated at Oxford and Leyden, Rous had studied law for a short time before retiring to the country in 1602 to devote himself to theological pursuits. He was elected to Parliament in 1625, where he was soon regarded as an uncompromising Puritan and where he was subsequently to be one of the most effective critics of the Anglo-Catholic leadership in the Church.² He was returned as a member of the Long Parliament in 1640 and almost immediately distinguished himself as a formidable debater and as an administrator of rare capacity. His name appears on innumerable select committees during the first five years of the Long Parliament and he was not infrequently called upon to negotiate compromises between the Commons and the House of Lords or the Westminster Assembly.

His earlier writings and his speeches in Parliament would indicate that he was a moderate Anglican who, like so many conservative men of the era, had been driven into the Puritan camp by what he denominated the treasonable intention of Laud and his supporters to join the Church of England with Rome.³ He was therefore inclined during the early months of the Civil War to support the Assembly in its effort to rear a soundly protestant Establishment. By 1645, however, Rous was

¹ My inclination to ascribe the *Ancient bounds* to Rous is principally based on the close similarity in style, point of view, and eccentricities between it and the *Balme of love*, which is known to be from his pen. Dr. Briggs and Dr. Gillett (the McAlpin Catalogue) have likewise tentatively attributed this important work to Rous. It should be pointed out, however, that the book exhibits far greater tolerance and largeness of view than Rous apparently possessed in 1645. This was the year when he, like so many of his contemporaries, embraced the theory of toleration as the only effective cure for the English religious and political problem. A liberal in 1645, Rous was allied with the Independents in 1647. (*H.M.C., Egmont Papers*, I, 440.) There is need for a careful study of the career and thought of this interesting and significant man.

² Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 125, 167.

³ *S.P.Dom., Charles I*, ccccl, 94.

completely alienated by what he could only regard as a studied effort to impose a new and even more monstrous spiritual tyranny upon the nation. Under these circumstances he was inclined to support the Independent group in Parliament and to embrace the cause of religious liberty with singularly few reservations.¹ In the Nominated Parliament, in which he served as speaker, he declared that petty quarrels over religion had profaned the Church and that in his judgment the variety of religions in England had no greater significance than the variety of complexions to be observed amongst its citizenry.

The ancient bounds is one of the most dispassionate and objective of the many works written in defence of spiritual freedom. The author declares in the preface that it is his object "to institute every Christian in his right to free judging" and to prove that Christianity will in fact gain immeasurably from the triumph of an unlimited toleration for all Christian communions. Rous wrote as an Independent, but his work rarely mentions the group; its arguments are predicated upon bases not typical of the literature of the party, and no trace of sectarian feeling is to be observed in its pages. The book is remarkable for the comprehension which it displays, for the strength and subtlety of its argument, and for welding into a synthesis all the evidence which could be advanced in the support of religious liberty. The author preserves, in addressing himself to the most controversial subject of his generation, a rare good temper and an admirably balanced judgment. Even when he undertakes to demolish the Presbyterian position he does so by employing the arguments which the Assembly had advanced in support of an exclusive system, carefully eschewing the vituperation and personalities so typical of religious controversy in this stormy period.

The ancient bounds called England to the stern realization of the fact that neither sound preaching nor compulsion was effective for securing uniformity of religion in the nation. All reasonable men must agree that this is self-evident and that religious toleration must follow in consequence to fill the vacuum left by the disappearance of the exclusive church from

¹ For Rous's later attitude in the House of Commons *vide S.P. Dom., Charles I, dxvi, 56, and S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protector te, lxxviii, 10.*

the institutional life of the realm. The clergy, who are animated at once by ambition and tradition, alone fail to realize this high necessity and unless they are forcibly restrained chronic unrest and war will ensue. Rous therefore called upon the state to impose a legal toleration on all Christian sects in order to save religion from its own excesses. This Erastian view, which such diverse motives may inspire, was, as we have previously observed, very widely entertained in England. It supplied, in point of fact, the central focus around which that most remarkable coalition of parties, Independency, was to be organized.

Francis Rous arrived at a doctrine of religious toleration by an unusually conservative approach to the problem. He addressed himself to responsible opinion and evidently wished to found his system of thought upon unassailable principles of reason and necessity. In any state, he submits, there will be a religious communion which the magistrate favours and which he regards as preaching most purely the doctrines of Christ. No valid objection can be raised against any favour which the ruler desires to bestow upon such a National Church. The magistrate, if he be Christian, cannot assume an entirely passive attitude towards religion; those talents with which he has been endowed he must improve. Nor will he offend the conscience of the nation by permitting the public preaching of non-Christian groups like the Socinians or of antisocial factions like the Familists, though he cannot and should not attempt by means of coercion to compel the minds and consciences of such men.¹ For the power of the magistrate is strictly civil. He simply endeavours to create a civil society in which religion may flourish and truth may be more generally ascertained. When certain laws of nature and definite social teachings are accepted by all of his Christian subjects, he may and should punish flagrant violations of these social *mores*, though in this instance his action is civil rather than religious. He will encourage sound preaching, will seek to enliven the ministry, will call synods for the reviving of the church, and will be exemplary in his own public and private life. Above all, however, he will encourage all men in the realm to seek truth, helping not only those who agree with the views of his own

¹ [Rous, Francis], *The ancient bounds, or liberty of conscience, etc.* (L., 1645), 4.

church but those who earnestly seek God though their feet appear to him to be mired in error. He will dilute with his magnanimity the bitter acid of controversy and will seek to compel all men of whatever opinion to deal with each other charitably and reasonably.¹ By these means religion will come to flourish vigorously within the state; truth will be mightily advanced; and Christian unity may slowly resolve the diversity that has hitherto been hardened by persecution.

Unhappily, this principle of statecraft, which is rooted both in natural law and in Christianity, has been oftener advanced by heathen rulers than by Christian. The heathen kings of the Old Testament afforded unlimited freedom of worship to religions other than their own.² Toleration was apparently a "received" principle in that age, founded on the "natural conscience" and the persuasion of common justice.³ In the age of the gospel it is even more urgently necessary that the ruler shall not restrain any dissenting group that desires to found a church in the pursuit of a new way to God. The pious ruler will regard such "heresies" as beneficent and will rather employ the civil sword for the restraint of those who seek to molest them than to implement their suppression.⁴ "There is much the truly conscientious expect from our governours . . . not a toleration onely, but an accommodation, incouragement, and sufficient protection from all molestation and damage."⁵ For the Christian magistrate must realize that he does not possess the power or capacity to define the truth or to bind men to any doctrinal formula.⁶ Christ is the sole judge between truth and error and when any human institution arrogates that power to itself it is guilty of an hideous blasphemy.

The civil state must be brought to realize that it has few functions in religion beyond imposing a toleration in which faith may flourish. The Christian ruler enjoys sovereignty upon precisely the same basis as does the heathen—no additional authority may be adduced from the fact of his Christianity.⁷ "This practise of magistracy, to be the dictator of truth, and to moderate with the sword, lays an unhappy caution, and too

¹ [Rous], *Ancient bounds*, 8-11.

² *Ibid.*, 43.

³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

effectuall an obstruction, in the way of truth, which comes not in alwayes at the same end of the towne; not alwayes by the learned and eminent in parts and power."¹ When the ruler employs the weight of his authority for perpetuating the views and glosses of the dominant religious group within his dominion he trespasses the bounds of his rightful authority, invades the kingdom of Christ, and lays waste those foundations upon which the true Church must be erected.

Rous was unequivocal in his denunciation of religious persecution, proceeding from whatever motive towards whatever end. It may be held, indeed, that his treatment of this difficult question was one of the most significant contributions made to the subject during the revolutionary era. Every human being, he submitted, must be left free to hold and vindicate his religious views. Though it must be admitted that there is but one truth, no argument for spiritual coercion can be derived from this fact. For this "truth cannot be so easily brought forth without this liberty; and a generall restraint, though intended but for errorrs, yet through the unskilfullnesse of men, may fall upon the truth; and better many errorrs of some kinde suffered, then one usefull truth be obstructed or destroyed."² God has permitted error to flourish and truth to remain obscure; surely some divine purpose which escapes our feeble understanding has moved Him in this decision. It may well be that error fulfils a useful function in trying the faith and testing the constancy of those who deem themselves orthodox.

A simple truth underlies the Christian religion, a truth so self-evident that it has too often been obscured and forgotten. The worship of God and faith in Him rest upon a free conscience and a rational persuasion. Conscience "will not be beholden to any man for its liberty, so neither is it capable of outward restraint, they must be morall or spirituall instruments that can worke upon conscience."³ When every conscience is left free to seek God in its own way, much diversity and some error will arise, but this is certainly harmless and very probably salutary. For error cannot be extirpated by coercive means. Force rather hardens and disseminates heresy. It is the certain way to ensure that it will spread firm, deep roots. Thus in

¹ [Rous], *Ancient bounds*, 17.

² *Ibid.*, Pref.

³ *Ibid.*, 2.

England the episcopal tyranny was the "instrumentall cause and meanes of those extremities of absolute separation and Anabaptisme, which many honest and tender hearts (thinking they could never run far enough from the bishops) did run into."¹ Much harm has already been wrought in England by rigorous courses, yet it is possible that if compulsion were abandoned and "free teaching of truth set on foot, and liberty given to try all things," the extremists might even now be regained. Something deep in human nature, from the time of Adam on, has caused men instinctively to desire to taste that which is forbidden to them. Persecution has never destroyed an heresy but it has bred many new ones.

Even more important, however, is the fact that persecution violates the essential dignity of man and the spiritual integrity of all those who call themselves Christians. We are granted an absolute right to try all faiths before we call one our own. Any restraint imposed upon this God-given birthright is at once tyrannous and impious. God will have every man freely persuaded in his own mind, and no other means can bring a human being to the knowledge of saving faith. Force destroys and vitiates the meaning of faith and lays waste the very substance of the Christian religion. We gain faith by the slow trial of experience and by the patient and free conviction of reason. "Let us look upon ourselves in all our discourses, as hunting after it; every one acting and seeking for himselfe, and for his part onely, acknowledging that God must lead every man by a sence and instinct . . . and this liberty of free disquisition is as great a meanes to keep the truth as to find it. The running water keeps pure and cleare, when the standing poole corrupts."² Errors will arise when absolute freedom prevails, just as they have arisen when the most bloody persecution has sought their destruction. We must leave their disposition in the hands of God who has permitted them, labouring against them only "by the ministry of the Spirit, by the Word of God, which in the hand of the Spirit is quick and powerfull . . . and [by] holding forth the contrary light, doctrinally and practically."³ We may be sure that God will reveal the full measure of His

¹ [Rous], *Ancient bounds*, 30.

² *Ibid.*, 34.

³ *Ibid.*, 40.

truth in His own way and season. Until that time we must seek it freely, patiently, and with a large tolerance.

The author's theoretical denunciation of persecution was as well argued as it was complete. A firm basis in theory having been laid, Rous addressed himself more explicitly to the problems which his generation faced in the treatment of opinions that were generally regarded as heterodox. He first sought to prove from the scriptures and from history that dissenting sects must be tolerated and then endeavoured to elaborate a formula which would appeal to all reasonable and pious men.

Those who uphold the principle of religious persecution draw their proofs entirely from the Old Testament and in their desperate anxiety to lend support to an untenable position wrench and distort the Holy Scriptures. The Jews employed compulsion for the eradication of idolatry in fulfilment of a solemn covenant under which they had been granted the land of Canaan. They proceeded under a specific and temporary injunction as a people who were at once a church and a state. They were under a law that has no efficacy in the age of the gospel.¹ Theirs was a formal and legal worship, whereas ours is a worship of the heart and mind which no human being may compel or order. Their rulers were appointed, ordered, and deposed by God, whereas ours derive their sovereignty from forces wholly unconnected with their faith. Neither their discipline, their conformity, nor their judicial laws have the slightest relevancy in the age of spiritual faith inaugurated by the gospel.

Every utterance and every action of Christ betokened the complete freedom which He desired to prevail in religion. He constrained no man to faith and He permitted the numerous Jewish sects of His age to flourish without restraint or rebuke. "What word ever dropt from Christ's mouth, of violence to be used against them, as to drag them before the magistrate, or the like."² Moreover, despite the heresies and dissensions

¹ Their service was "outward, consisting much in the conformity of the outward man and practise to certain worldly ordinances, to the production and preservation of which the . . . magistrates compulsion might beare a great proportion of sufficiency and efficacy." ([Rous], *Ancient bounds*, 59.)

² *Ibid.*, 51.

which wracked the primitive church, the apostles did not trespass beyond the bounds of reason and persuasion in combating them. Even the imperious Paul confined his wrath and zeal to exhortation and admonition. The divine wisdom of Christ was abundantly confirmed by the greatest of the heathen emperors of Rome, who saw clearly that no human mandate could coerce the religious conscience. Then, following his citation of Marcus Aurelius, Rous clinched his case with an ironic thrust, by indicating that even Thomas Edwards, in the most bitter of all the orthodox Calvinist works of the age, had admitted that Christ's religion could not possibly rest upon force and persecution.¹

No possible justification can be advanced to support the persecution which has for so long disgraced the Christian Church. Persecution has arisen from sources wholly extrinsic to Christianity. It is derived either from a presumptuous conviction that we enjoy fulness of knowledge or from an arrogant spirit on the part of those "that would tie all men to their girdle, that cannot endure any should differ from them, lest they should be preferr'd before them, that abhorre any change of their opinion, though it be for the better . . . that cannot bring downe their stomacks to follow another, and receive light from their brethren."² Persecution is the prop that proud and evil men have employed to buttress up the decaying fabric of institutions, whether they be true or false. It is the last refuge of men rendered desperate by their own fear and insecurity. This is not to say that religious error does not exist or that it is not to be considered seriously. Rather, the author argued, the one means which we may not employ against it is the arm of persecution. Rous then turned bluntly and honestly to the difficult question of the attitude which the church and the state should assume towards those men who are generally regarded as stricken with mortal error. It is at precisely this point that every seventeenth-century writer reveals his essential tolerance or intolerance.

The Holy Ghost determined that there would be diversity

¹ [Rous], *Ancient bounds*, 57. For a consideration of Edwards's thought, *vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 281-287.

² *Ibid.*, 29.

and likewise that there should be error in order that the truth might be tested and matured. None but spiritual remedies was appointed for its correction and we must tread warily indeed in combating heresy lest we find ourselves guilty of "over-witting Christ."¹ We have no power to repress known heresy, nor do we possess infallible capacity for defining it. No man can honestly say that he is or has always been free of spiritual error. No sane man would dare enforce upon another human spirit religious opinions that may be subject to momentary change. No saint will wittingly hold to an error; when any man errs it is through an ignorance that cannot destroy our love for him. We ravage the church and wound Christ again when we rend the unity of faith and lay waste the fair structure of charity by our insane zeal for orthodoxy. The church has been all but consumed by this madness which may well be compared to that "when two owners of a field of corn [who] cannot agree about the fashion of the hedge" determine to set the corn on fire.² We are constrained to deal charitably and tolerantly with all diversity which we regard as erroneous, in the realization that we too may shortly exchange our present judgment for a better since we are not yet seised with fulness of truth.³ We will be restrained from intolerant actions by the reflection that both sides in every religious controversy advance impressive arguments and muster formidable support from the scriptures. Truth may lie for centuries under the suspicion of error since in our fallible knowledge they are ever closely intertwined. We may, then, hate error but we dare not hate those whom we deem to be infected with error.⁴ We cannot risk quarrelling with God for failing to reveal to the heretic that measure of truth which we possess. Our sole means for the restraint and correction of error are those spiritual weapons with which Christ has endowed His Church. We must seek truth patiently and humbly, extending to all other men the full right to gain saving knowledge and faith by those means and capacities with which God has blessed them.

By an adept mixture of theoretical and pragmatic arguments

¹ [Rous], *Ancient bounds*, 30.

² Rous, Francis, *The balme of love, etc.* (L., 1648), 12.

³ [Rous], *Ancient bounds*, 27.

⁴ Rous, *Balme of love*, 8.

Rous has focused a devastating attack upon the principle of enforced uniformity. The position which he had assumed would have been highly radical a generation earlier, but by 1645 the sheer logic of historical development had convinced powerful elements of English opinion that a theory of institutional life which for a full millennium had enjoyed universal prestige must of necessity be abandoned. The question which exercised Parliament and the nation so profoundly was what religious order was to replace the exclusive national church. To this problem a number of solutions were propounded, the most important of which was Cromwell's notable attempt to organize a loosely federated church comprising numerous evangelical sects, with a reasonable toleration for other communions that offered no threat to civil or social stability. Rous suggested that the problem must be solved by establishing in the minds of Christian men and women a new and nobler view of the nature of religious unity. The world has been absorbed for so long in the vain effort to impose a dead and formal unity of behaviour that it has forgotten that men may actually be joined in a spiritual unity though they do not agree in all questions of dogma and though the patterns of their worship be dissimilar. When the deadly disease of persecution has once been cured, we may well discover that we have in fact long been one in the essentials of faith and worship.

The fact of diversity, it must be remembered, does not destroy the substance of Christian unity. There is a unity of mercy and forbearance derived from our love of Christ that cannot be gained by a formal uniformity founded upon repression.¹ The children of God should never rest until they attain "that Catholicke spirit by which we may embrace the Catholick Church with a Catholick love."² When we realize that all professing Christians revere Christ we will not dare destroy another for differences which, though they appear large to us, may in Christ's view be insignificant. The Church has been so cruelly deceived by intolerant spirits that it has all but destroyed the delicate fabric of unity by pressing men into the meaningless mould of a dead uniformity. We should reflect that "Gold may be bought too deare, so may uniformity. And is it not as vaine

¹ [Rous], *Ancient bounds*, 61.

² Rous, *Balme of love*, 7.

an expectation to have all men of one apprehension in all things, as to have all men of the same stature or complexion, or their faces to be all alike?"¹ The Catholic Church, as well as catholic unity, cuts across the puny sectarian barriers to unite all Christians in love and in worship of Christ. When this fact is recognized no substantial argument can be voiced against the toleration of all sects under the protection of the state.

Liberty of conscience, then, is dictated by the very nature of religion and by the requirements of Christian unity. Indeed, the principles which underlie it are deeply rooted in the law of nature and were recognized and accepted by all of the enlightened heathen.² Christ has vested His Church with spiritual weapons wholly adequate for the advancement of truth and for the suppression of error, so long as we do not permit them to atrophy by depending upon the frail arm of the magistrate. The truth of God is all-powerful when it is preached by a devoted and godly ministry. It is ironical that "we count it presumption instead of faith, to relie upon God in the use of spirituall means, without carnall weapons, to bring men to the truth."³ We may rest assured that, when the ministry cannot bring a sinful man to the realization of faith, the magistrate is powerless to secure his redemption. For the Christian world must realize lest it perish that the magistrate is concerned only when a man ceases to be a good subject; he has no direct interest and certainly possesses no power to punish a subject who ceases to be a good Christian.⁴ The paralysing confusion between the civil and the spiritual spheres must of necessity be cleared before substantial progress can be made towards the attainment of the Kingdom of God.

The leaders of orthodox thought render lip service to the truism that men may be gained to Christ only by reasonable conviction, yet they cannot release from their grasp the deadly cudgel of brute force. It must be said again that men who err are to be regained, not by force and not by stopping their mouths, but by sound preaching and sound doctrine; not by "conventing them before the magistrate, but by convincing them in their consciences."⁵ God alone comprehends the

¹ [Rous], *Ancient bounds*, 62.

² *Ibid.*, 18-19.

³ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

mysterious ways of salvation. He is infinitely patient as men seek feebly and dimly for a knowledge of saving faith. The Holy Spirit "waites, and violates not the liberty of the reasonable soule, by superseding the faculties thereof, but approves every truth to the understanding, and moves the will without violence, with a rationall force."¹ We dare not be more zealous than God in combating error and in bringing men to Christ; the restraint of heresy is a good work, but it may not be accomplished by impious means. Impiety cannot be cured by impiety. Error can be conquered only by the power of the Word in which we will impose implicit confidence as we are truly men of good faith. For too long the Church has been deluded by the apparent might of the tangible symbols of earthly power, and has not truly believed in the vast resources of strength which lie within its grasp. "God stands ingaged to make good His Word, and then 'tis no matter how weake and unlikely the meanes be, if God be bound for it."²

Religion will gain an illimitable accretion of strength when absolute liberty of conscience is permitted to all men. The state will then withdraw from onerous duties which do not properly concern it, which have involved it in tragic civil strife, and which have laid in ruins the "native authority and majesty" of religion.³ The ruler will at last confess that his "cobwebs" cannot "catch those that the nets of God cannot." It is especially important that England should repudiate all rigorous courses in religion lest the persecuting system of the bishops be replaced by the intolerance of those men who would force the three kingdoms into the rigid moulds of a Genevan Establishment.⁴ The civil state can best secure its own strength and further the true ends of religion by imposing a legal toleration upon the nation. Though it may well establish a state church, it must at the same time guarantee to all Christian groups the right which they derive from religion and nature to believe and to worship without restraint. This is the true objective of a civil war dedicated by a pious and resolute people to the destruction of tyranny in England; this is the end towards which the church has been struggling blindly and haltingly through so many tragic centuries.

¹ [Rous], *Ancient bounds*, 26.

² *Ibid.*, 64.

³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 66-69.

4. EDMUND WALLER, 1606-1687

Another religious moderate of the period, Edmund Waller, exhibited far less clarity of vision and a weaker grasp of the problems that confronted England than did the steady and courageous Rous. Waller was afflicted by an instability of character and an immaturity of intellect which prevented his fine genius from attaining the heights to which nature seemed to destine it.¹ Excellently educated, related by blood and marriage to the Hampdens and Cromwells, and associated for a season with the rare group of spirits that gathered around Falkland, Waller might in a happier age have made an important contribution to English thought and policy. By instinct a courtier, he required a great monarch for the development of his genius; he was fated instead to defend a bad one and to reach his maturity in an age of insecurity and grave unsettlement.

Waller was at heart a moderate in politics and religion. Since he instinctively feared any change in the fabric of institutions, the violence of the attack of the extremists upon episcopacy threw him, with so many of the moderate intellectuals, into the arms of the king. He was exiled in 1644 for participation in the blundering plot which bears his name, but was permitted to return in 1652 after having made his peace with Cromwell. Since Waller recognized in Cromwell the principle of order and conservatism which he regarded as necessary for the maintenance of institutional life, the admiring lines that he addressed to the Lord Protector cannot be dismissed as fulsome flattery:

"While with a strong and yet a gentle hand,
You bridle faction, and our hearts command,
Protect us from ourselves, and from the foe,
Make us unite, and make us conquer too;

Let partial spirits still aloud complain,
Think themselves injured that they cannot reign,
And own no liberty but where they may
Without control upon their fellows prey."²

¹ Courthope, W. J., *A History of English Poetry* (L., 1920-1926), III, 278.

² Waller, Edmund, *Poems* (ed. by G. T. Drury) (L., 1904), II, 10.

Waller adjusted himself to the Restoration with an easy and somewhat suspicious enthusiasm. He speedily established himself in the role for which he was naturally intended, a court poet of wit, distinction, and grace in a society that was ordered, reasonably moderate, and institutionally secure. At the same time, however, his thought on the subject of toleration had grown more mature. The experiences of the revolutionary period had convinced him of the futility and danger of coercion and in the Cavalier Parliament he frequently addressed himself to a vigorous and eloquent denunciation of religious repression.

Waller's political philosophy is admirably expressed in his speech on supply delivered in the House of Commons in April, 1640. One of the most conservative of the moderate group, he held that the ills of the nation were to be attributed to the bad advice by which a beloved king had been misled. No inherent harm has been done to the constitution or to the liberties of the nation; harmony and good will may speedily be restored by the correction of grievances. Parliament is consequently obligated to require the king in advance of supply to restore to the people the liberties of the subject and the inviolability of property.¹ The Anglo-Catholic divines have been guilty of deluding the king with the vicious doctrine "that a monarch must be absolute, and that he may do all things *ad libitum*," ignoring the fact that "if to be absolute were to be restrained by no laws, then can no king in christendom be so; for, they all stand obliged to the laws Christian; and we ask no more; for, to this pillar are our privileges fix'd."² Parliament must seek the restoration of the constitution by every means within its power while carefully avoiding innovations. The anger of the subject must not be permitted to invade the prerogatives of the crown. But equally dangerous is the novel doctrine of royal absolutism which has grown up amongst the king's advisers. Even granted that absolutism were a better form of government, "we all know how dangerous innovations are, though to the better; and what hazard those princes must run, that enterprize the change of a long-establish'd government."³

¹ Waller, Edmund, *A speech to the House of Commons, etc.*, in *Works* (L. 1730), 258-259.

² *Ibid.*, 261.

³ *Ibid.*, 263.

The deep-seated distrust of innovation and the conviction that change must come slowly and conservatively likewise pervades Waller's treatment of the religious problem in the early sessions of the Long Parliament. An evident distrust of the clergy, and particularly of bishops, permeates his thought. The clergy must be restrained and the imperfections that have come to infect episcopacy should be cured, though the institution must be preserved. Waller had but slight love for episcopacy, but with Falkland he shrank from the revolutionary consequences of innovation. In his speech concerning episcopacy he admitted that the bishops had been guilty of persecution and stupid oppression. They "were armed with a dangerous commission, of making new canons, imposing new oathes, and the like," but Parliament has already "cut and pared" their "hornes and clawes."¹ Parliament should reduce episcopal power to the point where it no longer offers any threat to political or religious liberty, carefully avoiding more serious institutional surgery than is required. The clergy have been principally interested in preferment and in extending their own power, and "since they are so ready to let loose the consciences of their kings, we are the more carefully to provide for our protection against this pulpit-law, by declaring, and reinforcing the municipal laws of this kingdom."² Assiduous and conservative care, however, must be exercised. "Episcopacy, and the evils thereof, are mingled like water and oyle. . . . But . . . our lawes and the present government of the church are mingled like wine and water."³ Nations should build carefully and reverently upon those foundations which time has made secure. England in her present crisis must exercise great prudence lest she discard all that is good in the vain quest for phantom ideals.

Waller displays a conservatism in religion which almost appears to cloak a pervading scepticism. He would seem to hold that the truth or falsity underlying episcopacy is far less important than the fact that it enjoys institutional validity in the life and traditions of England. "I look upon episcopacy,"

¹ Waller, Edmund, *A speech . . . concerning episcopacie, etc.* ([L.], 1641), 3.

² Waller, *Speech to the House of Commons, Works*, 262.

³ Waller, *Speech . . . concerning episcopacie*, 4.

he confessed, "as a counter-scarf, or outwork, which if it be taken by this assault of the people, and withall this mysterie once revealed, that we must deny them nothing when they aske it thus in troopes." A hard and keen mind was but partially masked by the propriety of Waller's remarks. Religion was to him a matter of constitutional rather than of personal significance. It gains its validity from the institutional habits of a people rather than from any divine ordination; one form appears quite as proper to him as another since anything can be proved by the Bible.¹

There is much of scepticism and a great deal of implicit tolerance in Waller's thought. He saw very plainly that a mean must be preserved between the stupidity of clerical tyranny and the institutional and social ruin which would ensue following the destruction of the Church of England. He did not argue the divine foundation or the exclusive truth of that Church; he simply submitted that in the lay control which undergirded it and in the comprehension of its conception were to be found the most certain guarantees of religious freedom and reasonable tolerance. Above all, as he was later to say so eloquently, persecution and coercion proceeding from a conviction of infallible truth are insupportable dangers in a modern state. Persecution, Waller reminded Parliament in 1673, should be regarded as the greatest of the dangers to the stability and moderation necessary for a good life in any nation.² It drives men from the kingdom and forces them into disloyalty, but never into the Church; it disrupts the state and accomplishes the ruin of commerce and industry.³ Surely we have learned that the human spirit cannot be coerced and that persecution is destructive to the interests and genius of the nation.⁴ I would not, he declared in 1668, "have the Church of England, like the elder brother of the Ottoman family, strangle all the younger brothers."⁵ The best way to restrain dissent is to ignore it and to treat those in error with studied charity and tolerance. "These people," he remarked with a contemptuous

¹ Waller, *Speech . . . concerning episcopacie*, 6.

² Grey, Anchitell, ed., *Debates of the House of Commons, from the year 1667 to . . . 1694, etc.* (L., 1763), II, 33.

³ *Ibid.*, II, 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 132.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 128.

kind of tolerance, are "like children's tops; whip them, and they stand up, let them alone, and they fall."¹

Waller reflected the uncertainty which seized the Latitudinarian party upon the outbreak of the Civil War. Instinctively conservative, somewhat timorous by nature, and without clear insight into the currents of change which were sweeping England towards new moorings, he was disposed to cling desperately to the institutions and traditions of the past. Yet he pleaded vigorously for reason and moderation in religious questions and cast a spear of considerable renown against the pretensions of those who would further endanger the peace and stability of England by a vain and dangerous attempt to coerce the human conscience.

5. JOHN COOK, *d.* 1660

Waller had proposed a conservative, an essentially Elizabethan, solution to the religious problem in order to gain the tolerance and the lay control of the Church which he regarded as both necessary and desirable. The radical thinker, John Cook, sought to arrive at the same goal by a very different chain of reasoning. Cook was a moderate in his religious philosophy, was almost brutally secular in his proposals, and was refreshingly bold and direct in the precision of his thought. We have previously noticed that Cook embraced Independency in the conviction that the coalition of sects which comprised it could be united in the defence of liberty of conscience against Presbyterian oppression. We have examined in some detail his important manifesto, *What the Independents would have* (1647), which sought to unite the party firmly in the defence of an unqualified liberty of conscience.² But Cook wrote as an Independent for no other observable reason than expediency. In his *Redintegratio amoris*, published in the same year, he revealed the characteristically moderate and secular quality of his thought. The book is one of the most incisive and effective of the vast number of tracts that considered the problem of toleration in the revolutionary era. Cook wrote easily, without inhibition,

¹ Grey, Anchitell, ed., *Debates of the House of Commons*, I, 220.

² Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 421-425.

and with an ever incandescent wrath against all forms of ecclesiastical tyranny.

Cook lashed out at religious persecution and spiritual arrogance with an almost hissing anger. The persecutors, having all but destroyed the Church, are now apparently bent upon dissolving the civil society as well. All Europe has been embroiled in a pointless and stupid intestinal conflict over religion. "Look at France," he commanded. There the French Protestants preach that the rulers of the land are damned, unless they forsake their idolatry; the priests "quite the contrary that not a Hugonet can be saved." Men are consumed by a blind and furious passion about religion which leads them to violate the very nature of true faith. "In the name of God," Cook exclaimed, "what ails us? Cannot we like bees hive into one body politique because we differ in opinion . . . shall small matters disjoyned them whom one God, one Lord, one faith, one spirit, and one common cause . . . have linked together?"¹ The dread infection of the Inquisition is creeping over all of Christendom. Men who proclaim themselves pious have apparently forgotten that true faith cannot be founded upon violence; they ignore the fact that the peace which the gospel should bring can never be attained until absolute religious liberty is enjoined.

The morbid virus of persecution has come to infect even those who regard themselves as the orthodox in England. These men forget that "an Englishman scorns to have his religion cudgelled out of him," that brave and honest men cling even more stubbornly to their conscientious views when they are lashed with the whip of tyranny.² England has most to fear from the spiritual arrogance of the Presbyterians who, so recently delivered from persecution, now strive to nail other Christians upon the same cross.³ They seek with an impudent zeal to usurp the sovereignty of Christ over the human conscience. They denounce heresy and error with a venomous anger, quite forgetting that the "greatest error and heresy in

¹ Cook, John, *Redintegratio amoris, or a union of hearts, between the Kings most excellent majesty, the . . . Parliament, . . . Sir Tho. Fairfax, . . . the Army . . . the Assembly, and every honest man, etc.* (L., 1647), 80.

² *Ibid.*, 81.

³ *Ibid.*, 39.

this kingdome is to assume a power over the consciences of Gods people.”¹ They seek nothing less than to prescribe faith to every Englishman, as if faith could be gained at the command of a fallible authority.

The sinister intolerance of the Presbyterians is all the more remarkable and insensate, Cook submitted, since they are nothing more than an insignificant minority in the nation. Cook estimated, with probable accuracy, that two-thirds of the realm were still devoted to moderate Anglicanism. Nor can the Calvinists lay just claim to the infallibility which they so presumptuously proclaim. They have their Assembly, but Christ was outvoted by antichrist in countless assemblies long before the orthodox convened at Westminster. In point of fact, the Assembly is damned by its own persecuting zeal. Those who inveigh most vociferously against heresy are the most likely to be mired in error. The orthodox fanatics at Westminster seek to impose the cross of persecution upon tender consciences and to break the fragile unity of Christ’s Church in England. “I am sure,” Cook eloquently confessed, “if Gods glory were aimed at, no difference of opinion amongst Protestants could possibly break the bond of love; may we meet in heaven together to praise God eternally. . . . Is there any man in London but sayes he hopes to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ . . . or if not, shall we send him to Hell?”² England has already stained her history with the blood of countless martyrs. She must rise up to throw off those “bloody wolves” of persecution that still delay the attainment in the nation of a complete and necessary liberty of conscience.

Cook had no hope that the religious toleration which he regarded as absolutely necessary for the restoration of civil and religious peace in England could be gained by the ready consent of the various struggling communions. Toleration, he suggested, would have to be imposed by a sharp and stern prescription of the civil state. Religion must be saved from its own intolerant enthusiasms. In particular, the impious pretensions of the Presbyterians must be curbed by Parliament, which should protect all who cannot conform to the monstrous discipline that the Assembly plots to impose. The very essence of state

¹ Cook, *Redintegratio amoris*, 41.

² *Ibid.*, 43.

policy, as well as the requirements of religion, makes it necessary for Parliament to order that "no coercive violence may be offered to such as be religious and peaceable in their differences."¹ The Civil War has been waged to secure religious freedom, and the army must stand prepared to impose upon Parliament the pressure necessary to make certain that the fruits of victory are not perverted by the orthodox. The Assembly, which has spent its time spinning fine distinctions and embroiling the pious, must be sharply restrained and must be made aware of the fact that it cannot deliver a free people into a new bondage.

There is no subtlety in Cook's programme for toleration. He attacked the problem of religious liberty and assailed its enemies with an almost brutal directness and with a harsh realism. The entire question should be taken from the hands of the divines and should be settled effectively and permanently by the army which is dedicated to the cause of liberty and which happens to be the master of England. But—and here Cook was carefully specific—the issue of toleration must be faced honestly. There can be no subtle evasions, no clever exceptions, and no jockeying for spiritual dominance on the part of the several sects. Every Protestant group, however heretical, must be granted unconditional freedom. For obvious civil reasons, quite unconnected with religion, the papists cannot be afforded liberty. Their record in England has been bad and their policy chronically dangerous. They have been foremost in the support of the king, they are the avowed enemies of the revolutionary party, and are, in brief, too dangerous at the present time to warrant toleration.² When, however, they are less powerful and display a disposition to live quietly and peacefully with other religious groups, they too will merit liberty of worship. It is the essential evil of popery, tyranny over the human conscience, that must be effectively extirpated from England.³ The State should rise above sectarian ambition and fanaticism to ensure to every man liberty of finding and worshipping God in his own way. Men must be left free to choose the Directory, the Prayer Book, or any other formula of worship to which mature reason and considered conviction impel them.

¹ Cook, *Redintegratio amoris*, 28.

² *Ibid.*, 47.

³ *Ibid.*, 63.

The tuition of religion, reason, and policy persuades England to the immediate erection of a legal toleration. She must make her choice quickly and cleanly between the spiritual tyranny of a Presbyterian Establishment and the freedom which lies within her grasp. Cook warned Parliament that if rigid Presbyterianism "should be settled in this kingdom in the height and power of it, it would undoubtedly cost ten times more blood to remove it, then ever it hath done to abolish episcopacy."¹ England has little real sympathy with Presbyterianism. She has rather been duped into tolerating its establishment by the fear of heresy and error which the Assembly has so skilfully engendered. The nation has listened to men who do not have "faith enough to beleieve that truth will at the length get ground of error, nor cleerly understanding that the sword of the spirit must cut down errors, takes the materiall sword which was never sanctified to that purpose."² The spectre of heresy has been conjured up to frighten and entrap those who do not comprehend the meaning of faith. Slight differences of doctrine and ritual have been distorted into heresy; the peace of the nation has been endangered by those who would fasten upon it a prescriptive gloss of faith. No Christian approves of error, or what he imagines to be error, but he will realize that the only possible remedy for heresy is persuasion and that spiritual maladies can be cured by none other than spiritual remedies.³

Cook's thought is typical of a large and influential body of lay opinion that had developed in the harsh period of civil and religious conflict. Though evidently Christian, it was bitterly contemptuous of the clerical intelligence and even of clerical honesty, and demanded the rude and effective intervention of the civil state in order to secure the benefits of religious freedom. The efforts of the rigid Presbyterian party, itself so recently repressed, combined with the fanatical pretensions of several of the sects, caused many men to throw off all sectarian ties and to assume a kind of lay Christianity which had no institutional content and but slight dogmatic substance. This powerful and on the whole sceptical impulse lent to the coalition which we call Independency a peculiar strength and

¹ Cook, *Redintegratio amoris*, 63-64.

² *Ibid.*, 65.

³ *Ibid.*, 57.

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certainly undergirded the Cromwellian settlement of religion. Nourished by a profound reaction to the surviving elements of the theory of persecution, this point of view was but one stage removed from the indifference which was ultimately to win a complete if inglorious victory for religious toleration.

6. *THE MODERATOR* (1651)

This remarkable development of lay thought is strikingly confirmed by a significant pamphlet, *The Moderator: endeavouring a full composure and quiet settlement of those many differences both in doctrine and discipline*, which appeared in 1651 and was re-published in the following year. The author of this anonymous tract adopted and enlarged the Latitudinarian position as defined by Chillingworth and Hales, but his views betray the hardening of thought and the anti-clericalism which were the consequence of the failure of the Protestant groups to find a reasonable and durable basis of peace and mutual tolerance after the overthrow of episcopal repression.

Following closely the analysis so brilliantly expounded by Acontius almost a century earlier,¹ the author sought to prove that the persecution and controversy which had long devastated the Church and prevented the attainment of liberty of conscience were rooted in fear. He shrewdly observed that "the maine hinderance . . . of confidence and cause of feare is the endeavour of force; and if I once begin to endeavour force, I seeke not onely security to my selfe, but the conquest of that which I thinke is mine opposit; because I cannot naturally rest secure as long as that which I count an enemy is not subdued."² When men grasp the weapons of force they inevitably impose confidence in them alone. Thus when a religious group, fearful for its prerogatives or its dominance, begins to persecute, its fears are multiplied and it is driven deeper into persecution, while, at the same time, the fears of those who are persecuted are multiplied and their course is rendered desperate.³ Churches

¹ Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, I, 318-322.

² *The Moderator: endeavouring a full composure and quiet settlement of those many differences both in doctrine and discipline, etc.* (L., 1651, 1652), 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

are hence seduced by fear and persecution into an ever-widening circle of vicious repression which ultimately destroys the very substance of society.

It is strange, indeed, that fear should ever invade the church that professes at least that its truth is derived from God. Actually, the church is apprehensive not for its truth but for its mundane prerogatives and its traditional power. Such a church betrays its want of confidence in God and its unwillingness to suffer. "If then I to avoyd suffering for righteousnesse will secure myselfe by force, and make others afraid of mee; it is evident that I doe not commit my selfe and my cause to God in well doing, but I take it in mine owne hand, to manage it by mine owne strength."¹ The church is ensnared by this psychological weakness and is led to the violation of the primary tenets of the Christian faith. Heresies are imagined, disputes are magnified, and persecution is embraced by the clergy, who pervert the church and poison the minds of Christian men and women. They seek by these actions not the glory and triumph of God but the perpetuation of their own power. In this way the Christian ministry and Christianity itself have been brought into contempt. Licence and heresy may arise simply because the ministry has been concerned with factious disputation rather than with preaching. Certainly it may be said that the clergy cannot hope to reform others until it has reformed itself.²

Unity of faith and progress of religion are possible only when the phantom of persecution has at last been banished from Christian society. Satan walks at large armed with a terrible power when he can secure the punishment of unorthodox opinions by death or infamy. He raises up disputes in matters that can never be certainly known and inspires a too zealous clergy to demand the extirpation of all dissidents.³ Bitterness and stubbornness inevitably lead to persecution and religious conflict, thereby stultifying the will of God and advancing the designs of Satan. The evil plight into which the Church has fallen cannot be remedied until Christians regain control of religion from the clergy.

The spiritual unity of Christendom already exists, although

¹ *The Moderator*, 4.

² *Ibid.*, 77.

³ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

the organized churches have steadily declined to recognize this transcendently important fact. In England, in particular, the ministry is in complete agreement upon all the essential articles of faith, and sufficient doctrinal unity has long since obtained. The awful tragedy is that the churches persecute as heretics those who are one in faith with them. The Latitudinarian author of the *Moderator* defined the fundamental doctrine of the Church as acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God, as the sole rule of faith, and as containing all that is necessary to salvation.¹ All churches agree that a true knowledge of God ensures man eternal life, that man is saved by faith in God through Christ alone, and that there has ever been a true Church in which God was truly worshipped.² No stricter definition of doctrine is necessary and, indeed, none can be made, without arousing controversies which prove that the additions are by no means clear or infallible. If men can only agree upon these fundamentals and agree that they are fundamentals, surely they will be able to find a common ground of unity and happily tolerate all that men or sects choose to add for their peculiar spiritual comfort.

When Christians are brought to a realization of this substantial unity of faith, persecution will instantly evaporate. Fear will be removed, tolerance will prevail, and the Church may press forward to a fuller understanding of God's truth. We will no longer condemn a man as dangerous simply because his views are not fully in accord with our own and the "darke malicious devill, who covers himselfe oft-times with a cloak of light and zeale for holinesse and truth" will be banished from Christian society. It will be discovered that the Church in England has been brought to the verge of ruin and dissolution because its ministry has been unwilling to govern itself by a Christian spirit,³ has fostered faction and dissension, and has betrayed its very vocation. The author called upon the Christian conscience of the nation to impose the counsels of moderation upon the warring sects, to recall the clergy to its high and holy mission. "Where is the man to bee found," he demanded, "that doth truely mourne, and not rejoyce rather at his opposites parties failings and miscarriages . . . where is hee that

¹ *The Moderator*, 31 (mispaged).

² *Ibid.*, 40.

³ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

doth seeke to heale breaches upon common principles and without particular interest . . . and who is hee that doth blow a retrait from the battell and seeke for a cessation from needlesse and injurious controversies?" It is this spirit of moderation and magnanimity that must triumph before tolerance is secure and the dignity of the human conscience complete.

7. SIR HENRY VANE, 1613-1662

Perhaps no man in public life in England did more than Sir Henry Vane, the younger, to defeat the plans of the Presbyterians for the erection of an exclusive Establishment. Brilliant in his strategy, quick in his perceptions, astute in his judgment of men, Vane lacked only a firm philosophy and solidity of character to rank as a great statesman. Though his public career was blighted by his collision with Cromwell, which forced his retirement from Westminster in 1653, though he came in consequence of his lightning-like shifts in policy to be distrusted by all parties, Vane remained absolutely and doggedly devoted to the theory and practice of religious liberty. In fact, it may be argued that the fluidity of his politics was in no small degree the result of his determination to secure as the first principle of a revolutionary settlement the legal guarantee of spiritual freedom. The leader of the Erastian bloc in the Commons, Vane was at all times the formidable enemy of every plan for securing a revival of spiritual coercion and was prepared vigorously to support any undertaking which would secure the tolerance that he so passionately desired. It is only when Vane's policy is considered with this guiding principle in mind that his career acquires meaning and dignity.

The son of a successful politician, Vane had been educated at Oxford, where he adopted Puritan views. In 1635 he emigrated to America, having been inspired in part at least by a desire to secure liberty of conscience. He was appointed governor of the staunchly orthodox Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636 and almost immediately became involved in the Hutchinson disputes that were to have such a decisive effect upon the religious and social life of the community. The pious colonial government had viewed with horror the gradual

infiltration of persons infected with radical religious tenets and had enacted legislation calculated to prohibit the settlement of such heretics.¹ The Hutchinson controversy posed an anarchistic, intensely individualistic view of religion against the organic and exclusive Calvinistic system of thought of the orthodox majority.² Vane embraced the cause of the Hutchinson group with vigorous enthusiasm upon very significant legal and theoretical grounds. Massachusetts, he pointed out, was a Christian community governed by a royal charter. Magistracy cannot base civil rule upon hostility to certain religious opinions. The Christian state may not exclude those whom it deems to be in error, but will rather seek to secure their conversion by spiritual means.³ "Such as are confirmed in any way of error, though all such are not to be denyed cohabitation, but are to be pitied and reformed." The power which the orthodox in Massachusetts sought to arrogate to themselves, Vane alleged, would destroy the foundations of any state, institute an hideous system of persecution, and despoil the conscience of mankind.

Vane returned to England in 1637 a liberal and mature politician. Upon the convention of the Long Parliament he rapidly established himself as the leader of the war party in the House of Commons and of the brilliant group which protected the cause of religious toleration with such skilful manœuvres during the trying months when the Scottish alliance was necessary for the prosecution of the war. We have previously commented on his adroit tactics in securing a certain saving flexibility in the wording of the *Covenant* without alienating the grimly orthodox Scots and have noticed that as early as 1644 Baylie recognized him as the most dangerous of all the enemies of an exclusive national religious settlement.⁴ He lent powerful support to the bill requiring the Assembly to seek some means of accommodation with the Independents and, exhibiting the ever-shifting offensive tactics of a leader of a

¹ Hutchinson, Thomas, *A collection of original papers relative to the history of the colony of Massachusetts-Bay* (Boston, 1769), 67 ff.

² Jones, R. M., *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (L., 1914), 274.

³ Hutchinson, *Original papers*, 71-83.

⁴ Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 34, 45-46. For other comments on his career, *vide ibid.*, III, 29, 56, 65, 83, 90, 253, 258.

determined minority, kept the orthodox majority off its balance during the months when it appeared certain that a rigid Presbyterianism was to be riveted upon England. In 1647 he was able for the first time to reveal his hand clearly with the brutal threat that the army would intervene if any effort were undertaken strictly to enforce the provisions of the *Covenant*. Vane's work had been largely accomplished by this date; a brilliant parliamentary strategist who was superbly gifted when on the defensive, this remarkable man lacked sufficient stability of character and policy to contribute notably to the settlement of a new constitution. "A man of great natural parts and of very profound dissimulation, of a quick conception and very ready, sharp, and weighty expressions,"¹ Vane fought and won the struggle against Calvinistic orthodoxy in the face of apparently insuperable odds.

In the early and decisive years of that struggle he was able, according to Clarendon, to convince the Presbyterians of his earnest desire to erect their system in England and to draw them deeper into a rebellion which they could endure only for that end, while laughing at them and plotting for a religious toleration which would make a shambles of the ideal church which they envisaged. Here indeed was a man of great understanding, who "pierced into and discerned the purposes of other men with wonderful sagacity, whilst he had himself *vultum clausum*, that no man could make a guess of what he intended."² There was much of justice and wisdom in Milton's estimate, penned in 1652, that here was a man "young in years, but in sage counsel old."

"Both spiritual power and civil, what each means,
What severs each, thou hast learned, which few have done,
The bounds of either sword to thee we owe,
Therefore on thy firm hand religion leans
In peace, and reckons thee her eldest son."

The too brilliant shifting and the occasional political duplicity of which Vane may justly be accused did not, however, affect the constancy of his religious thought. He was devoted with a

¹ Clarendon, Edward, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, etc. (Oxford, 1888), III, 34.

² *Ibid.*, VII, 267.

warm consistency to the cause of religious liberty, which he regarded as the necessary corner-stone of any civilized and Christian state.¹ A member of no sect, Vane subscribed to a lay Christianity which regarded all dogmatic systems with suspicion and which was disposed to reduce religious truth to the circumference of the individual understanding. Burnet was told by Vane's friends that he awaited a clearer revelation of dogma and "leaned to Origen's notion of an universal salvation of all, both the devils and the damned, and to the doctrine of pre-existence."² Probably somewhat influenced by the mystical writings of Boehme,³ Vane's religious writings are difficult to understand and are hazy in their texture. Clarendon has commented that his religious works lack "his usual ratiocination" and has suggested "that the subject matter of it was of so delicate a nature, that it required another kind of preparation of mind, and it may be another kind of diet, than men are ordinarily supplied with."⁴ Baxter observed that Vane's religious views "were so clowdily formed and expressed, that few could understand them, and therefore he had but few true disciples."⁵ Though this criticism may justly be applied to Vane's devotional and doctrinal writings, which would appear to be the random jottings of a busy man, it cannot be levelled at his treatment of the subject of religious toleration, which is clear, precise, and carefully ordered.

Vane concerned himself principally with the relations of the Christian magistrate to religion, in an effort to prove that the temporal and spiritual spheres should be sharply differentiated. The civil state should confine itself exclusively to the temporal affairs of mankind. It is not "to intrude itself into the office and proper concerns of Christs inward government and rule in the conscience . . . but is to content itself with the outward man."⁶ The ruler invades conscience and wages war on Christ when

¹ Baxter, Richard, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, etc. (L., 1696), I, 75.

² Burnet, Gilbert, *History of my own time*, etc. (Oxford, 1897-1900), I, 285.

³ Willcock, John, *The Life of Sir Henry Vane the Younger*, etc. (L., 1913), 254.

⁴ [Hyde, Edward], *Animadversions upon a book, intituled; Fanaticism fanatically imputed to the Catholick Church, by Dr. Stillingfleet, and the imputation refuted and retorted by S.C.* (L., 1673), 61.

⁵ Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 75.

⁶ Vane, Sir Henry, *The retired mans meditations*, etc. (L., 1655), 388.

he seeks to "intermeddle with mens consciences by way of . . . force, in matters of religion and divine worship." This injunction of Christ was clearly understood and scrupulously practised by the early Church. But, unhappily, the Church in the fifth century, to avoid persecution, allied itself with the state. In consequence it was soon corrupted, the purity of its doctrine was perverted, and the charity of its mission vitiated. For more than a millennium its canons and doctrines have been hopelessly entangled with the civil constitution to the end that persecution and bloody courses have all but consumed it.¹ The Church has been lost in a dark maze of persecution and temporal tyranny from which there is no escape unless it renews its devotion to the principle of complete spiritual liberty, "so that instead of going . . . backward, we are to go forward and to be still enquiring and learning out more of Christs mind in this great work."²

England, Vane wrote in 1656, rose in civil war in order to overthrow the paralysing arm of spiritual tyranny and to free the Church from its impious connection with the state. In so doing it found support in a supreme law, sealed by Christ's blood, which prohibits the magistrate from meddling in the realm of conscience. The ruler has no other function than to order men in civil matters and to maintain the peace: these are the exactly defined limits of his power. He should be restrained from the slightest impingement upon conscience by a voluntary recognition of this principle which should be embedded in the fundamental constitution of the state. By this means alone "a great part of the outward exercise of antichristian tyranny and bondage will be plucked up by the very roots."³ Religious toleration must be firmly adopted as a principle of law if the nations of the world are to be confirmed in their right to the free worship of God, purchased by the awful propitiation of Christ's blood.⁴

Vane, who had contributed so notably to the achievement of a large degree of spiritual freedom during the trying days of the

¹ [Vane, Sir Henry], *The face of the times, etc.* (L., 1662), 70-74.

² Vane, *Retired mans meditations*, 389.

³ [Vane, Sir Henry], *A healing question propounded and resolved upon occasion of the late publique and seasonable call to humiliation, etc.* (L., 1656), 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

Long Parliament, was a decade later deeply sceptical in his attitude towards organized religion. Men seek their own preferment and endeavour to achieve the domination of their own faction, even at the terrible price of persecution. Religious tyranny has become so engrained, the selfish pride of the clergy so intense, that when men are freed from one species of spiritual bondage they will invent another for their enslavement. The bishops and the Presbyterians had been put down at the cost of civil war but, Vane gloomily concluded with the Independent Establishment in mind, "the same spirit is apt to arise in the next sort of clergy, that can get the ear of the magistrate, and pretend to the keeping and ruling the conscience of governors."¹

Vane's theory of toleration, though unsystematic and somewhat intuitive, was complete. It was firmly rooted both in his remarkable political philosophy and in his highly individualistic doctrinal conception, which should be considered in turn. The state, in Vane's view, is a portion of the natural, created world which, though it has long been devoid of spiritual content, may through dedication to Christ's mission achieve an ennoblement of its normal functions.² As man may be lifted up by the animating energy of his religious destiny, so the state of which he is part may contribute to the moral perfection of the world. Man owes the state a limited obedience; in fact it possesses sovereignty over the true Christian only when it reflects the moral purpose and inspiration with which he is instinct. Man is subject to the state only when it commands goodness, by the determination of the enlightened and resolved conscience.³ Its capacity for government is limited at once by its obedience to God's will and by its reflection of the will and consent of the subjects who compose it. It does not, in other words, create right as an attribute of its power but is itself the creation of moral right. It is bound, in so far as it is a just state, to the rule of "immutable justice and right . . . first stated and ascertained" in the declared laws of God, and may command only "the just and reasonable things which [God's] own law

¹ [Vane], *Healing question*, 7-8.

² Vane, *Retired mans meditations*, 383, 384-387.

³ *Ibid.*, 387-388, 392-394.

commands, that carry their own evidence to common reason and sense."¹ In its every prescription there must be apparent to the godly man the clear moral purpose and the will of God.

This remarkable doctrine of sovereignty reduced the state to an organism limited by the conscience and reason of the individual citizen, just as Vane's religious theory regarded the church as subject to the untrammelled judgment of the Christian man. In Vane's thought we observe the ultimately anarchistic logic of sectarian individualism. Nor was this all. The sovereignty of the state, Vane taught, was further limited by the fact that it enjoys valid authority only in so far as it is the creation of the free will of the nation at large. No man is required to render to the state an obedience which destroys the freedom of his will. The will of the state must represent the wills of the governed, so that all are in reality bound by none other than their own wills. No man may invade his own conscience in fulfilling a command of the magistrate, since his individual reason and conscience are the original of the ruler's authority. There are, indeed, certain fundamental rights and freedoms of the people which have such universal and undeniable conformity with the light of nature, right understanding, and the law of God, that they can in no way be destroyed or altered. One of these natural rights, which is self-evident, which measures the just claim of any state to sovereignty, is absolute freedom of conscience. Vane takes this as wholly axiomatic and does not deign to support it with any confirmatory arguments. It is a privilege of free men to be asserted upon "grounds of naturall right," and it flows from the equality of all men in religious matters.² This right of religious freedom accrues to us generally as we are men and specially as we are Christians who have no overlord of conscience save Christ. When any restraints are imposed upon the freedom of the human conscience we "intrude into the proper office of Christ, since we are all to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, whether governours or governed, and by his decision only are

¹ Vane, Sir Henry, *The people's case stated*, in Forster, John, *The Statesmen of the Commonwealth of England, etc.* (L., 1846), *App.*, 347; *et cf.* Vane, *Retired mans meditations*, 384-385, 390-391.

² [Vane], *Healing question*, 5-6.

capable of being declared with certainty, to be in the right or in the wrong.”¹ To the natural right of tolerance which all men enjoy, moreover, there has been added the necessity of toleration in the Christian state. Any civil order which seeks to overthrow that natural and Christian prerogative is *ipso facto* illegal and no longer merits our obedience.

The case of religious toleration, argued from political and natural grounds, has rarely received stronger justification than it did from the wandering and somewhat erratic pen of Vane. Though he all but destroyed the institutional solidity of the state in the process, he lent to man as a political being a new dignity and discovered in the very nature of the state an effective and noble principle of sovereignty. In his somewhat chaotic and wholly unsystematic writing on doctrine he confirmed his theory of toleration by the assertion that it lay at the very heart of the religious experience and that it constituted the necessary essence of true Christian faith.

It is quite impossible accurately to classify Vane's theology. His thought clearly evidences the influence of the Seekers; it is in some respects mystical; there are flashes of an almost unmasked rationalism; and there is on every page the rough and blunt analysis of the nakedly lay intelligence. Like so many of the thinkers of his generation, Vane twists and warps orthodox religious thought into a pattern of his own design, while sturdily granting the right and duty of every Christian to do the same. Contemptuous of rigid doctrinal formulae, distrustful of the clergy, scornful of technical niceties of theology, the great parliamentarian wrestled manfully with the problems of faith to bring forth an answer which, while it satisfied him, must have scandalized every communion of his day.

Essentially, Vane held that the Christian sects erred in cleaving to the harsh law of the Old Testament which rigorously limited salvation. They ignored, or impiously restricted, the universal efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, which has no meaning whatsoever aside from its universality. Christ's propitiation was competent for the salvation of men and created, as well, a new order of society and a new world.² Christ has accomplished

¹ [Vane], *Healing question*, 6.

² Vane, *Retired mans meditations*, 159-160, 175.

the restoration to man and to the world of the possibility of perfectibility. His blood was shed for all and it is blasphemous to limit that sacrifice, as the orthodox persistently do, to an imagined group of the elect.¹ The sacrifice was itself an election of all men to salvation. The divine light burns in all men, including the heathen, and hence no sect and no church can lay arrogant claim to an exclusive possession of divine truth and blessing.² It is accordingly not only incredibly intolerant but it is stupid to persecute men whom Christ has destined for salvation. Persecution in Vane's theory loses all moral and all institutional meaning, becoming an act of pure sadism.³ He sees no occasion to defend religious liberty; it follows naturally and inevitably from the very structure of his religious thought. Intolerance must therefore be regarded as the worst of all sins, as the sin against the Holy Ghost; which hardens and perverts the soul of man and which usurps the spiritual Kingdom of Christ with the tyrannous kingdom of Satan.

Man stands absolutely free before God in a relationship that may not be violated by the harsh intervention of the civil authority. The Christian in this *milieu* of complete freedom remains a seeker after truth, sensitive to the streams of revelation which constantly enlighten the vision of the patient and humble Christian.⁴ The truth which the Christian attains is wholly relative to his own capacities and understanding; he will instinctively realize that it is a monstrous and destructive act to impose the limited truth which he has gained at any given time upon another human being. The Church of Christ remains invisible in this world, a nebulous circumference which encircles men and women in various stages on the way towards perfectibility of grace and knowledge. Such a Church cannot persecute, and the persecution which sinful men and ambitious clerics occasionally perpetrate in its name is a travesty on the meaning of faith. Man stands alone, terribly alone, in Vane's theory, patiently awaiting a further revelation of truth but secure in the conviction that all men will in good season be saved by the miracle of Christ's sacrifice. Intolerance and persecution fall away like a poisonous fog that has for too long

¹ Vane, *Retired mans meditations*, 187, 199-200.

² *Ibid.*, 186-187.

³ [Vane], *Healing question*, 7-8. ⁴ Vane, *Retired mans meditations*, 350-352.

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obscured the clear and cleansing rays of God's light. Sir Henry Vane contributed importantly to the legal attainment of religious liberty in England; his contribution to the theory which undergirds it is far greater than has been supposed.

8. SIR MATTHEW HALE, 1609-1676

There are embodied in Sir Matthew Hale's thought the finest elements of Latitudinarianism, sobered and hardened by two decades of religious and political conflict. Hale, the son of a poor lawyer, was left an orphan at the age of five and was reared in the strict household of Puritan kinsmen.¹ The Puritan Obadiah Sedgwick was his tutor at Oxford, and during his residence at Lincoln's Inn Hale was under the influence of the renowned lawyer and parliamentarian, Sir John Glanville. Hale rapidly gained a deserved reputation for learning in the law and for deep religious piety. Throughout his life he was intimately connected with the leading moderates in England, with Selden and Ussher in the revolutionary period, and with Baxter and the liberal bishops during the Restoration. Hale declined to associate himself closely with either of the extremist camps during the Civil War, and was able to preserve his independence of judgment and to attain a majestic aloofness of spirit which is mirrored in all of his religious writings. He was respected and trusted by both parties, accepting the dangerous post of counsel for Bramston and Laud in the early days of the War and later defending the eleven members against the accusations of Fairfax. None the less, he assumed the responsibilities of civil service in the Commonwealth, while retaining complete liberty of opinion and action. In 1651 he served on a committee appointed by Parliament to reform the laws and three years later accepted a commission from Cromwell as Justice of Common Pleas. Hale served on the bench with great distinction under Charles II and in 1671 was appointed Lord Chief-Justice of the King's Bench. He maintained his contacts with his Latitudinarian friends during this later period, lending quiet but steady support to those who were endeavouring to

¹ Williams, J. B., *Memoirs of the Life, Character, and Writings, of Sir Matthew Hale* (L., 1835), 2-3.

mitigate the severity of the Conventicle Acts and working earnestly to secure a more comprehensive and tolerant definition of the Church of England.

Hale achieved a philosophical tolerance which, uncommon in any age, was rare indeed in the seventeenth century. A moderate Anglican in his personal faith, deeply but modestly pious, he considered the troubled religious scene with dispassion, with good temper, and with an almost sceptical gentleness. Distrustful of sectarian passion, suspicious of an intolerance based upon impious claims to infallible knowledge, he counselled moderation, reason, and common sense in the attainment of the tolerance which he so much desired. Hale, like his greater Latitudinarian predecessors, was an intellectual aristocrat who despaired of influencing and calming the mad and fratricidal sects which were destroying the comprehensive religious conception to which he was so warmly devoted. His conversation and influence were apparently confined to a small group of kindred spirits and he was completely indifferent even to the publication of his own writings. Since most of his significant religious works were published posthumously by his friends, it is difficult to ascribe any exact date to most of them.¹ It is evident, however, in all that he wrote that his thought had been moulded in the bitter school of war and partisan struggle and, like Hobbes, even when he wrote during the Restoration, it was the Civil War that he had in mind.

Hale was strongly opposed to any system of uniformity, imposed by law and coercion, which by binding the conscience and spirit of mankind impeded the free play of reason. He held that Anglicanism could provide a salutary and convenient institutional structure for religion in England so long as it was broadly defined and tolerantly administered. The Christian Church, in his view, was a loosely organized institution which based its constitution upon commonly received religious truths and which permitted wide latitude to the individual and,

¹ The well-known *Contemplations moral and divine* was first published in 1676 and appeared in frequent and slightly variant reprints in subsequent years. In 1684 Baxter published *The judgment of the late Lord Chief Justice, Sir Matthew Hale, of the nature of true religion*, and in 1805 the Rev. T. Thirlwall edited the *Works, moral and religious* (2 vols.), which contain much material not previously available.

indeed, to the eccentric judgment. Above all else it avoids the fatal error of claiming a divine authority which it does not possess. Men have laboured without success for centuries to establish a divine foundation for innumerable churches. They have in consequence laid great and occasionally exclusive stress upon the externals and the dogmas of religion to the neglect of its inner and spiritual meaning. Men of piety and spiritual health have lived in every sect and in every church. Christ has established broad limits of truth for men who seek salvation, yet when we observe Christian history, "we shall find quite another kind . . . of religion than what Christ instituted or intended, and yet all veiled and shrouded under the name of Christian religion." That which Christ has left broad we strive to narrow; that which Christ commanded us to tolerate we seek feverishly to extirpate.¹ "It is most apparent, that the affixing of the seal of the king of heaven to any form of government, without a commission from Him, is a presumption and crime of a high degree." The scholars and the divines have warped a simple faith into an unfathomable system of metaphysics. In order to impose their own private formulations upon the free conscience of mankind, they have wrestled with questions that are either unimportant for our salvation or not capable of definition, among which Hale significantly included predestination, free will, and the trinity.² The Church has fallen into the unbelievable error of ruling infallibly and tyrannously in matters that cannot be certainly known. It has striven imperiously and intolerantly to impose forms which derive their paternity from faction and to crush out liberty in the name of uniformity. This is a uniformity of death; this is a conception of the Church which destroys the very marrow of religion.

As a moderate, Hale was inclined to attribute the persecution and intolerance which have disgraced the Church to an intemperate zeal born rather of pride and arrogance than of religion. He therefore devoted considerable space to an impressive analysis of the psychology of religion in order to lay bare the

¹ Quoted from manuscript material by Williams, *Memoirs*, 16-19.

² Hale, Sir Matthew, *The judgment of the late Lord Chief Justice, Sir Matthew Hale, of the nature of true religion, etc.* (L., 1684, 1832), 3-4.

roots of inordinate zeal. He was deeply impressed, as he reflected on religious history in his own and earlier ages, by the fact that most religious activity was expended upon matters not of vital concern. Zeal which is undisciplined runs out into "little collaterals" which breed hatred, controversy, and schism. Non-essential doctrines, which are really party symbols, assume in controversy an unmerited significance, perspective is distorted, and trivia are imposed upon the Christian conscience as veritable attributes of faith. Sects are frozen into rigid and intolerant constitutions and "much more severity, and persecution, and implacableness" is engendered "than there is between . . . Christians and Turks, or infidels, many times."¹ The essence of religion gradually disintegrates and charity and tolerance, which lie at the root of Christianity, become empty words on the lips of men who seek the destruction of fellow Christians.

This has been the unhappy fruit of inordinate zeal; this is the temper that has accomplished the ruin of the Church. The Church has apparently lost all sense of proportion and has strayed dangerously far from its true mission. Thus, in Hale's view, episcopacy appears to be the best form of government, but it would certainly violate truth to hold that men have not been excellent Christians under other or no church governments.² We have wandered so far from our course that we actually make a man's view on church government, or other senseless forms, the test of the propriety of his faith. "Such wild and wrong measures do men of extremes on all hands take of the true essence and ends of Christianity."³ The Protestants, who evidently agree on all the fundamentals of faith, are torn in a fratricidal conflict about non-essentials which imperious minds have conjured up until "as great weight is laid upon it, as if the whole stress of Christian religion, and the salvation of souls lay upon it."⁴

The great jurist lashed out with a biting irony at the foolish intolerance, the vicious enthusiasm, and the sacrilegious arrogance which men venerate as religion. He felt sure that the rival Protestant sects hated each other far more vigorously

¹ Hale, *Judgment . . . of the nature of true religion*, 21.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

than they did the Catholics or the Turks. They reminded the aloof and contemptuous Justice of a "company of foolish boys, who, when the nut is broken, run scrambling after the pieces of the shell," while they neglect and lose the kernel which was the object of their contention. Hale shrewdly observed that Protestantism was in dissolution because of a sectarian anarchy that could never be cured unless the reformed churches agreed upon a common and broadly stated conception of saving truth which would bind them in institutional tolerance. He was gravely troubled by the variety of eccentric sects spawned by the Civil War, and was driven to the pessimistic conclusion that men invent sectarian symbols and party slogans in religion in order to distinguish themselves. He was half persuaded, in other words, that Christianity, and especially Protestantism, was mortally stricken with a fatal virus which caused factional groups to slough off from the main stem of Christian development. Men are moved by material and egotistical motives which, though disguised with religious symbols, have none but destructive consequences to political and social life.

Hale came to question the sincerity and honesty of all fanatics, and it should be observed that he levelled the accusation of fanaticism against every communion of his generation. Burnet, in his biographical notice printed in Hale's works, relates that when Hale was an assize justice during the Commonwealth, certain Anabaptists who had created a disturbance in a parish church during the communion service were cited before him. The Justice angrily pointed out that "it was intolerable for men, who pretended so highly for liberty of conscience, to go and disturb others, especially those who had the encouragement of law on their side."¹ Men, he feared, were gripped by an intolerant and certainly unchristian zeal which caused them to distinguish themselves by "certain select opinions, practices, or modes, which are like the badges or colours, that give each party his denomination, distinction, and discrimination; and consequently these discriminative badges have as great a rate set upon them, as each sect sets upon itself; and therefore must be upheld under the very notion of

¹ Hale, Sir Matthew, *The works, moral and religious, of Sir Matthew Hale, etc.* (ed. by the Rev. T. Thirlwall) (L., 1805), I, 23.

the life of religion, and must be maintained with the greatest fervour imaginable; for otherwise the distinction of the sects themselves would fall to the ground, and become contemptible both among themselves and others."¹

Men, it is evident, are disposed, for reasons wholly unconnected with religion, to add to the corpus of necessary faith unessentials which in time obscure the vital meaning of Christianity. They interpret religion in the light of their own peculiar interests, needs, and ambitions. No group in Christian history has strayed farther into this impiety than the clergy, who trim and order religion "in that dress, that may most make it their own, and secure it to themselves."² Every sect and every church claims an infallible and complete truth; persecution and intolerance issue immediately and destructively from this sacrilegious and unreasonable assumption. The world has been torn with bloody wars and the fair structure of the church laid in ruins by this haughty and irreligious psychology of persecution, itself born of zeal and nurtured in worldly arrogance.

The cure for the dangerous ills which afflict the church and which have brought so much misery to human society was, in Hale's judgment, so obvious and so simple that he despaired that men, caught in admiration of their own intricacies and trapped in the fruits of their own pride, could be brought by reasonable persuasion to accept it. The great jurist's solution was an unexceptionable religious toleration within the structure of a comprehensive church that was posited firmly upon those fundamentals of faith acceptable to all reasonable men. All men, he argued, have some religion, and "though in different degrees, some principal sentiments of true religion."³ This is the solid foundation upon which the church of the future must be built. Further, he reasoned, the Christian religion as outlined by the Bible is the most perfect rule and guide of our duty to God. Since it was designed for all men, whether learned or unlearned, "it was fitted with such plain, easy, and evident directions" in things necessary to be known and done that any human being can comprehend its truth sufficiently for his own salvation. That which the simplest man by his own reason can

¹ Hale, *Judgment . . . of the nature of true religion*, 12.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.

understand is, by definition, the largest circumference of belief that we may indubitably denominate fundamental.¹ True religion, Hale often confided to Baxter, "consisteth in great, plain, necessary things." The simplicity of Christian faith has been distorted by wilful clerics who have focused men's attention upon their own fallible glosses rather than upon the common truths upon which all men agree.² No church, Hale contended, can hold any creed save that of the Apostles, to which all communions adhere and to which they have added nothing that is either certain or necessary.³

This Latitudinarian Church, of which so many men, sickened by sectarian strife and division, dreamed, would in Hale's view accomplish the restoration of spiritual and civil peace while ensuring to all men that freedom and tolerance so essential for spiritual growth and vitality. Nor need this be a vaguely conceived, nebulously organized Church. Government, discipline, and ceremonies are permissible and salutary, so long as they are not so numerous as to destroy the spiritual character of religion or so imperiously imposed as to weigh upon the conscience of dissent.⁴ Above all else these non-essentials are not to be confused with religion. They are simply the institutional shell within which men can worship with the greatest comfort, propriety, and spiritual benefit. The pursuit of the "rubble" of our own fancy has nothing whatsoever to do with religion. We must ever be stayed by the reflection that whoever follows Christ in the fundamentals, "whether he be an Episcopal, or a Presbyterian, or an Independent, or an Anabaptist . . . hath the life of religion in him."⁵ Upon this rock alone can the fair edifice of Christ's Church be built.

But no institution can be finer or stronger than the elements of which it is composed. The fatal infection of persecution, Hale gloomily concluded, could not be eradicated from the Christian world until men had themselves been regenerated, whether by reason or the grinding tuition of experience. Zeal and arrogance prevail in the church to-day; moderation and

¹ Hale, *Judgment . . . of the nature of true religion*, 2.

² Hale, *Works*, I, 95 *et passim*.

³ Hale, *Judgment . . . of the nature of true religion*, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

charity must triumph before God's truth is correctly apprehended. Hale's central religious principle was the virtue of moderation, a conviction which he often declared the Civil War had abundantly vindicated. Men have strayed so far from that moderation which is the essence of Christianity that it would almost seem that Christ's Gospel "was a notion and speculation . . . never intended as a necessary rule of practice."¹ Self-interest and pride have ruled men even in matters of faith and every sect imposes its peculiar understanding as a divinely ordered truth. Those differences which divide Christians and churches are not handled sensibly and rationally, but with passion, scorn and hatred, calculated further and permanently to separate them.² The world has been torn with bitter feuds, waged in the name of Christ, with which He is evidently not concerned. This has been particularly true in England where an episcopal extremism was followed by a sectarian fanaticism, both equally inimical to Christian charity and tolerance. "We must take away all decency, order, and uniformity. Our ecclesiastical government was too tyrannical and sharp; and our cure was to have none at all."³ No lasting peace, no progress in the Reformation can ever be gained, Hale wrote in 1660, until the counsels of moderation and tolerance prevail. The extremists consume themselves in the fury of their own passion and give "the same weapon into the hands of others against them." No man and no faction can ever be won by a passionate attack which serves no other end than to breed a hatred that makes the quarrel irreconcilable.⁴ It is this passion which must be conquered before men may truly describe themselves as "Christian.

With a serenity and a dispassion that rose above the turmoil of the war and the partisan claims of harshly vigorous sects, Hale probed deep into the psychology from which persecution and intolerance spring. With the steady and detached skill of the physician he diagnosed the malady that afflicted the Church and indicated the cure, though he remained wholly sceptical

¹ Hale, *Judgment . . . of the nature of true religion*, 21.

² *Ibid.*, 23.

³ Hale, Sir Matthew, *Considerations concerning the present and late occurrences, etc.* (L., 1660).

⁴ Hale, *Judgment . . . of the nature of true religion*. 25.

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that zealous and self-righteous men would heed in 1660 the counsels of moderation that they had ignored in 1640. Hale's tolerance was real, proceeding as it did from a deeply pious intellect that was wounded and grieved by the passions that lacerated the body of religion in England. Though the sphere of his influence was narrow during his lifetime, the great jurist had maintained during a difficult period a noble tradition which, as old as Erasmus, had found its finest and richest expression in England.

9. PETER STERRY, 1613-1672

As Hale had brought to the defence of religious toleration an ordered and analytical mind, Peter Sterry wrote and preached in its support with all of the rushing spontaneity of the poet. Though deeply moved by the Platonists at Cambridge and considerably influenced by the mystics, Sterry remained an individualist in theology and a poet in expression. He thought of himself as a Calvinist, but his was a Puritanism ennobled and moderated by broad learning and tempered by remarkable charity. His thought, though fragmentary and confused, was instinct with a rich tolerance and a rare compassion. His writings and his general position, as well as his character, remind one strikingly of an earlier Puritan moderate, Richard Sibbes, who a generation earlier had contributed so importantly to the origins of the Latitudinarian movement.¹

Sterry was born in Southwark in 1613 of middle-class parentage. His family appears to have been Puritan in sympathy and in 1629 Sterry was sent to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, for his education. There he fell under the influence of the Platonists, gained the esteem of Whichcote, and received an unusually broad discipline in the classics and philosophy. He was designated a fellow in 1639, but within a year resigned his post, presumably because he was unable to conform to the regulations imposed by the Anglo-Catholic authorities. He served for a time as chaplain to the Puritan Lord Brooke,² who

¹ Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 358-361.

² Pinto, v. de Sola, *Peter Sterry, Platonist and Puritan, etc.* (Cambridge, 1934), II.

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was probably responsible for his appointment by the House of Lords as one of the members of the Westminster Assembly. Though he seldom participated in its debates, he was attending its sessions as late as 1646 and was regarded by the astute Baylie as one of the Independent sympathizers in that body.¹ Sterry's tolerance and highly spiritualized religious position attracted the attention of Cromwell, who in 1649 secured his appointment as a preacher to the Council of State.² In the following year the Protector designated him a chaplain and for some years Sterry was to serve the government as a general adviser on religious questions. Following Cromwell's death, Sterry, accepting an appointment as chaplain to Lord Lisle, retired to the latter's seat in Surrey.

Dr. Powicke has ably characterized Sterry's theology as formless, mystical, and free. He sought with remarkable confusion to confine a broad, tolerant, and completely spiritual philosophy in rigid Calvinistic forms that could not receive the molten content of his thought. Sterry's tolerance was inextricably rooted in the almost anarchistic individualism of his faith. Though he declared himself to be a determinist, he averred with the same breath that predestination, properly understood, does not destroy true liberty. God is in all things and all action is necessarily determined by Him. But the necessity of any individual action rests not upon an external constraint, but arises from a subjective compulsion. Hence predestination itself confers an absolute liberty upon every man to follow out the thread of his particular destiny. Religion consists in the unfolding of each man's potentialities, enriched by a mystical knowledge of God. Every man must have complete freedom in this quest, and Sterry plainly believed that men of all creeds, whether Christian or pagan, could in the end discover saving faith.

The mystical identity of the believer with Christ is so complete, Sterry taught, that no external agency can intrude into that relationship. The Church can do no more than preach the sacrifice of Christ and unfold the spiritual content of His being

¹ Baylie, Robert, *The letters and journals of Robert Baillie, etc.* (ed. by D. Laing) (Edinburgh, 1841), II, 110.

² Powicke, F. J., *The Cambridge Platonists* (Cambridge, Mass., 1926), 177.

and message.¹ Man is saved when he attains a blending and "melting" of the spirit with Him. We may, he wrote, "by the fairest lights of reason and religion . . . judge that excellent poets, in the heights of their fancies and spirits, were touched and warmed with a divine ray through which the supream wisdom formed upon them and so upon their work, some weak impressions and obscure image of itself." When we achieve this identity with Christ we submit directly and solely to His guidance and His charity and tolerance. His spirit and leadership come at once to infuse us. Those who live under the precepts of the Law are enmeshed in fleshly principles which are fallible, false, and transitory. The impressions which such a man has of goodness "are made by terrour, and work unkindly."² But those who have attained a spiritual faith live with God and are good and tolerant because it is their nature to be good, because they are continually cleansed and enlightened by the outpouring of God's spirit. To be bound by the senseless forms of dogma and rites is like sprinkling plants with a watering-pot: while one is being watered the others perish. But spiritual religion is like the rain from heaven which refreshes and nourishes all.³

The religious man, we may say, is by definition a tolerant man. For God *is* love and the mercy and compassion of God will at least dimly pervade all who follow Him. Sterry counselled the England of his day to "study and practise that great command of love, as the lesson of thy whole life. . . . Let no differences of principles or practices divide thee in thine affections from any person."⁴ He who seems most worthy of our contempt and hatred may in reality be a neighbour and a friend. Religion is so intensely personal, so variegated in its nature, that we possess no means by which to lay judgment against another. Complete tolerance provides the only atmosphere in which truth may flourish and Christ's teaching flow without hindrance. We must reflect that our wilful pride separates us not only from our fellow Christians, but from God. It is intolerant rigidity which is the principal foe of the Kingdom of God.

¹ Sterry, Peter, *A discourse of the freedom of the will, etc.* (L., 1675), 130-133.

² Sterry, Peter, *The rise, race, and royalty of the kingdom of God, etc.* (L., 1683), 70.

³ *Ibid.*, 241-242. ⁴ Sterry, *Discourse of the freedom of the will*, Pref. (A2).

Sterry was more than a gentle theorist. In several sermons before Parliament, from the most important pulpit in England, he fearlessly applied the test of his complete tolerance to the religious struggle that was troubling the nation. He struck out vigorously and sharply at the Presbyterians, whom he accused of stiffness, arrogance, and intolerance, even though his own doctrinal views were in close accord with theirs. The Presbyterians, he alleged, stood convicted of seeking to confine a free and spiritual religion to the fallible and inelastic moulds of institutional dogma. They are guilty of the awful sin of seeking "to shut up Christ" in a prison of their own contrivance.¹ They betray an unbelievable want of religious apprehension; they belie by their actions the very nature of true faith. The religious struggle in England, he declared, following the battle of Worcester, had resolved itself into a conflict between ecclesiastical tyranny and religious liberty. Though he admitted that Presbyterianism enjoyed an almost pure church government, its arrogance and intolerance have made it far more dangerous than Catholicism to spiritual liberty.² For their doctrine is purer and hence more credible. Both share in the sin of elevating a human authority as the supreme arbiter in religious questions; both seek to restrain thought, which must wander freely and restlessly, to a particular and dead definition which they have fabricated. "They labour, as to hedg in the wind, to bind up the sweet influence of the Spirit." They seek to confine the spiritual nature of man to the bounds of formal and institutional symbols. Both are the mortal enemies of the spirit of Christ, though the Roman Catholics have at least given "a large scope to the understanding and affections in generous contemplations, in mysticall divinity."³ The Roman Church, if one is driven to choose, offers more hope and freedom to the human spirit seeking God than does Presbyterianism, though both are bigoted and intolerant. This is the evil pass to which zeal and intolerance have brought the Reformation in England.

¹ Sterry, Peter, *The clouds in which Christ comes, etc.* (L., 1648), 48-49.

² Sterry, Peter, *England's deliverance from the northern presbytery. etc.* (L., 1651), Dedic.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

Many accusations of intolerance were brought from many quarters against Presbyterianism during the revolutionary era. But there were few as direct, as telling, and as uncompromising as the attack levied by the moderate Sterry. He virtually charged the orthodox party with a complete misunderstanding of the true nature of religion and plainly indicated that in his view the intolerance of Calvinism constituted an insuperable barrier to the attainment of the absolute freedom so essential to the fruition of the individual soul. The Presbyterians are caught in the vise of their own rigidity, in the petty details of their own worship of institutional propriety, and are gripped by the bondage of the law. They are like a man, "that standing on the brink of a river, looks not up, to see the glorious image it self of the skie, but looking down, sees the shadow of it at the bottom of the waters."¹ From this spiritual slavery man must be delivered before he can discover the glorious freedom of Christ's spirit.

Despite the rancour and depth of the religious controversies which divided the warring England of his generation, Sterry maintained a calm moderation and an almost sublime tolerance. Again and again he insisted upon what he declared should be self-evident, that the law of love is the root of all religion. It is therefore important that we permit "no principle practices" to divide us in charity and love. History has demonstrated that in the most violently opposed parties we may find persons distinguished for truth and integrity. Men are likely to be so blindly divided by trivial matters that they fail to see that they really encompass the same fundamental truths. "In every encounter, thou mayest meet under the disguise of an enemy, a friend, a brother, who, when his helmet shall be taken off, may disclose a beautiful, and a well known face, which shall charm all thy opposition into love and delight at the sight of it."² The moderate divine called upon men scrupulously to differentiate between the evil, always a spiritual thing, which we oppose in other men and their persons. The aim of every religious man is the pursuit of truth: upon this all Christians

¹ Sterry, Peter, *The comings forth of Christ in the power of his death* (L., 1650), A4.

² Sterry, *Discourse of the freedom of the will*, Pref. (A3).

are really united. What a vast reservoir of power would be created, Sterry reflected, if all men who are united in their fundamental purpose would join forces "mutually to advance the ends of each other." Instead, however, men who worship the same God and profess the same Christ have destroyed one another and have laid waste the Church of which they are all members.

Sterry had no patience with religious controversy, even in matters which his age regarded as fundamental. Thus it seemed to him that the irreconcilable feud between Calvinism and Arminianism was at once unworthy and intolerant. Both sought no other end than to enlarge the bounds of truth and to glorify God, the one "to heighten the grace of God by its freedom and peculiarity," and the other "to enlarge the glory of this grace by its extent and amplitude."¹ All men who search for God in humility and tolerance have much to contribute and are certain of salvation. Actually the eccentricities of faith which we press upon other men with such amazing arrogance are nothing more than the accidents of birth, education, and circumstance. They possess a distorted importance for us because they are fastened deeply in our prejudices.

The Cambridge Moderate exhibits, despite the richness and depth of his piety, a marked strain of scepticism which is intimately bound with his striking tolerance. In sharp contrast to the body of orthodox thought, he taught that men may attain "subjective truth" in a variety of ways and that it would be folly to denominate one as the best, much less the only, way. "Nothing is mean and vile, seen in a right and universal light. Every degree of being to the least, the narrowest, and obscurest point, hath being it self in its amplitude and majesty in it. . . . Look upon each being, and you will see it as a spacious palace, a sacred temple . . . a new and distinct heaven."² Nor should truth be defined in terms larger than the individual for whom it alone has content. We are not blessed with capacity for the attainment of absolute truth. Our knowledge of God must remain dim, fallible, and partial. The truths which we possess "can be but broken things; we can have in them but pieces, but bits of spiritual truth, and but little, very little of spiritual

¹ Sterry, *Discourse of the freedom of the will*, Pref. (D).

² *Ibid.*, 30.

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glory." Absolute truth is as broad and complete as God, whom we cannot know fully. So long as we are in part corporeal, we cannot fully grasp a truth which is divine and wholly spiritual. Hence complete tolerance may be held to be a condition of the retention of truth. Sterry admonished every man to take heed of "over valuing any notion of thine; of undervaluing a notion of truth, which another man hath, or thou hast not. Thou hast but one piece of truth in thy notions; perhaps the other man hath the other piece in his notions." We must ever reflect that the same truth may appear under the guise of contrary opinions and conceptions.¹ The truth which we profess is ever limited by the frailty of our own knowledge and by the degree of light which God has seen fit to afford us. We will rest content with that measure of truth and will be scrupulous in extending to all men the same liberty which we have discovered to be the necessary condition of our own salvation.

Sterry gave to the principle of religious toleration a lofty and complete vindication, all the more impressive because it flowed from the well-spring of his own matchless piety. Though his strictures upon intolerance were less vigorous than those of the laymen, though his theory of toleration was less practical and explicit than that of many other writers, it gained especial weight from the fact that he was himself a divine of great learning and of at least respectable orthodoxy. Sterry cut away with clean and sweeping logic the very pillars of the persecuting philosophy to posit religious liberty upon the fundamental verities of the Christian life. A humanist in his learning, a moderate in his philosophy, a mystic in his spiritual nature, and a poet in his expression, Peter Sterry joined incomparable gifts in the defence of the sanctity of the human conscience.

10. THE MINOR MODERATE THEORISTS, 1640-1660

Perhaps no other group in the revolutionary period so accurately mirrors the underlying moderation of England even during an age of political and religious upheaval as do the minor Latitudinarian thinkers. The history of the age has been written from the point of view of one or the other of the two

¹ Sterry, Peter, *Appearance of God to man in the Gospel* (L., 1710), 410.

extremisms which were locked in a mortal conflict. Yet when we probe into the dimmer recesses of public opinion it is apparent that there was profound dissatisfaction and disillusionment amongst sensitive and finely balanced men who were gravely troubled by the kaleidoscopic changes in English life. These men were persuaded, and under the protection of comparative anonymity urged, that a broader spiritual tolerance and a deeper charity were alone sufficient to effect a cure in the life of the nation. Inheritors of the traditions of Christian Humanism, they gave calm and earnest support to a programme of restoration and compromise which, had it been accepted earlier, might have prevented the holocaust of war and internecine strife which then wracked England. In particular, these men were profoundly disillusioned in their religious thought; they distrusted the bigoted pretensions of prelate and sectary alike; they were repelled by the harsh philosophy of persecution; and they called upon England to embrace an intellectual tolerance in which their own spirits had found peace and refuge.

The minor moderate thinkers sharply rebuked the intolerant spirit that had nurtured war by a savage controversy over matters either unimportant or insoluble. They deplored the fact that England had forsaken reason to grasp the devouring sword of war. Thus Sir John Denham, writing in 1642, reflected that religion may be easily despoiled by that bigot who

“While for the church his learned pen disputes,
His much more learned sword his pen confutes”—

as by the contemptuous ridicule of the indifferent.¹ The gentle

¹ Denham, Sir John, *The poetical works* (ed. by T. H. Banks) (New Haven, 1928), 72. Denham (1615–1669) was born at Dublin, where his father was chief baron of the Irish Exchequer. Shortly afterwards (1617) Denham's family removed to London. Even while he was a student at Oxford, Denham's passion for gambling and his carelessness in financial matters earned for him an unenviable reputation which he was never able to overcome. Following the death of his father in 1639, Denham inherited a large estate which he very quickly dissipated. His greatest poem (*Coopers Hill*, 1642) would suggest that he was fully aware of the moral and constitutional weakness of the Stuart position, but as a conservative he found himself unable to lend support to rebellion. His military record was undistinguished and for some years after the war he lived in exile with the court. His exile was necessitated, the State Papers would suggest, by the miserable state of his financial

royalist physician, Henry Vaughan,¹ shrank from the ruin which the heavy and impious hand of war would inevitably lay upon the fragile structure of faith:

"Ah! he is fled
The souldiers here
Cast in their lots again,
That seamlesse coat
The Jews touch'd not,
These dare divide, and stain."²

Vaughan complained that he had been doomed by fate to live in a dread time when England levied war upon England, when the Church was laid waste by the fanatical fury of demented foes.³ Bigotry, Denham lamented, had destroyed the very roots affairs rather than because of his political importance, though he was able at the time of the Restoration to convince the king that he merited favour. He held several important posts in the Restoration government but soon lost all influence because of the sordid scandals in which Lady Denham became involved.

¹ Henry Vaughan (1622-1695) was a member of an old and distinguished Welsh family. He apparently left Oxford before taking his degree (Grosart, A.B., ed., *Works*, xxxvii) and prepared himself, possibly in a foreign university, for the practice of medicine. He returned to Wales to enter upon his profession and it was there that he composed the first volume of his poetry, which was published in 1646. His second volume of verse, published in 1650, displays a profound change in his philosophy and clearly reveals the impact which the spiritual and political struggles of the period made on a sensitive intelligence. Even the major facts concerning Vaughan's career are still most imperfectly known.

² Vaughan, Henry, *Works* (ed. by L. C. Martin) (Oxford, 1914), II, 410.

³

"Sed ut mea Certus

Tempora Cognoscas, dura fuere, scias.
Vixi, divisos cum fregerat hæresis Anglos
Inter Tysiphonas presbyteri et populi.
His primum miseris per amæna furentibus arva
Prostravit sanctam vilis avena rosam,
Turbarunt fontes, et fuis pax perit undis,
Mæstaque Celestes obruit umbra dies.
Duret ut Integritas tamen, et pia gloria, partem
Me nullam in tanta strage fuisse, scias;
Credidimus nempe insonti vocem esse Cruori,
Et vires quæ post funera flere docent.
Hinc Castæ, fidæq; pati me more parentis
Commonui, et Lachrymis fata levare meis;
Hinc nusquam horrendis violavi Sacra procellis,
Nec mihi mens unquam, nec manus atra fuit.
Si puis es, ne plura petas; Satur Ille recedat
Qui sapit, et nos non Scripsimus Insipidis."

—Vaughan, *Works*, I, 32.

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of learning and had shattered the foundations of civilization. The sectarian extremists have withered the seeds of learning and

“The tree of knowledge blasted by disputes,
Produces sapless leaves instead of fruits.”¹

Truth and learning, the wisdom of moderation and tolerance, have ever been feared and opposed by stupid and vicious men. During the Middle Ages Rome enthralled learning in “lazy cells” where superstition and persecution did their deadly work.² The Church and civilization were at last delivered from this slavery only to be inundated by a savage wave of controversies which the invention of the printing press, Satan’s “most pernicious instrument,” loosed upon Christendom. The progeny of these intolerant and senseless controversies has been hatred, confusion, and devouring war. Denham bitterly complained:

“But seven wise men, the ancient world did know,
We scarce know seven, who think themselves not so.
When man learn’d undefil’d religion,
We were commanded to be all as one;
Fiery disputes, that union have calcin’d,
Almost as many minds as men we find,
And when that flame finds combustible earth,
Thence fatuus fires and meteors take their birth,
Legions of sects, and insects come in throngs;
To name them all, would tire a hundred tongues.”³

Controversy and intolerance, the moderates submitted, have taken an awful toll in the coin of faith and learning. England, having deserted the counsels of moderation and reason, was being consumed in a war which was as vicious as it was destructive. Piety, tolerance, and learning have fled as they always must when the biting frosts of extremism freeze the rich and warm earth of human culture into the hard and infertile stones of bigotry. England, they taught, as well as religion, could be saved and revived only by the warm and gentle sun of moderation and tolerance.

The moderates were deeply grieved by the rancour of the religious divisions which prelatical zeal had spawned and

¹ Denham, *Works*, 115.

² *Ibid.*, 118.

³ *Ibid.*, 119.

which civil war had nourished. Irreparable harm has been done to the edifice of religion as well as to the foundations of the civil society, Thomas Povey lamented in 1642.¹ Both Anglicanism and sectarianism have become inflexible and have been maddened with the thirst for power, as if it were "necessary for governors by any other force, than that of reason, to bow men's minds into a rigid conformity of opinions."² The salutary temper of moderation has given way in the stress of war before the fiery breath of fanaticism. The *Moderate Intelligencer* in 1645 wistfully recalled, "How was a moderate bishop, judge, or justice adored in the times before this Parliament."³ Yet now this greatest of virtues has all but fled from England. Sectarian hatreds have become so implacable that if Parliament should win, a member prophetically complained in 1642, every vestige of the traditional Anglican system would be swept away.⁴ Indeed, so extreme is the zeal of orthodox spirits that a rigid and persecuting Establishment would probably replace that which has been destroyed. Nor could the victory of a king fortified by popish arms lead to anything but the restoration of an even more intolerant church structure. Reason, charity, and hope have been destroyed by the evils of rampant extremism.

Surely, the moderates pleaded, England has retained sufficient sanity and reason to know that a religious settlement not

¹ [Povey, Thomas], *The moderator expecting sudden peace, or certaine ruine* (L., 1642), 4-7. The son of a civil servant, Povey was educated at Gray's Inn. A moderate in temper, Povey disliked the extremisms provoked by the Civil War and for some years declined to join either side. He was returned to Parliament in 1647, where he almost immediately threw his rather slight influence to the attainment of a conservative settlement in religion and in politics. Since his activities brought him under the suspicion of the Council, his papers were seized and he was placed under bond in 1650 (*S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, 1650, pp. 149, 516, 541). He was again returned to Parliament in 1659 and with the Restoration was appointed to several public posts of some distinction (*S.P. Dom.*, Charles II, xlii, 11; lvii, 132). He knew both Pepys and Evelyn well, though the diarists held a higher opinion of his hospitality than of his attainments.

² Warwick, Sir Philip, *Memoirs of the reign of King Charles I* (L., 1702), 87. Despite Warwick's devotion to the royal cause and to the person of Charles I, his discussion of the religious problem in the *Memoirs* is moderate, thoughtful, and restrained.

³ *Moderate Intelligencer*, December 31, 1645.

⁴ [Povey], *The moderator*, 7.

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founded upon a broad tolerance and a comprehensive constitution cannot possibly survive for long. "The religion which all moderate men . . . desire, is that which both sides promise; and yet that which we cannot well expect from either side, should it become absolute."¹ The nation, then, can only hope that neither extremism will possess sufficient strength to triumph, that peace may be dictated by those moderate men who have engaged themselves on neither side. History has thoroughly confirmed the view that as "vertue is usually found in mediums and vice in extreames; so may it be admitted in a great measure that divine truth is found in mediums, and errours in extremes."² Bigoted men have insisted with such harsh and stupid zeal upon delimiting religious truth with absolute finality that the unity of the Church has been dashed into fragments.³ We have erred so blindly in the rigorous prosecution of non-essentials in religion that we have ignored the fundamentals of faith.⁴ Every sect, every church, has sought with fanatical resolution to destroy all who opposed it, with the inevitable result that the broils of the churches have inflamed the world.⁵ This devouring fire of extremism will not be damped, Denham insisted, until moderate men enquire:

"Is there no temperate region can be known,
Betwixt their frigid, and our torrid zone?"

Security cannot be restored until moderate men bring a fevered world to the realization that nothing but the "name of zeal" separates one faction from the other.⁶ Temperate men must rise to demand their birthright of freedom and tolerance. The moderate man is one who "would have his religion [neither]

¹ [Povey], *The moderator*, 9.

² L[awrence], R[ichard], *Gospel-separation separated from its abuses, etc.* (L., 1657), 1. Positive identification of the author is difficult. It is probable, however, that this was the Richard Lawrence who was graduated from Cambridge in 1647. A native of Norfolk, he was granted a living in that county in 1649, and in 1654 the inhabitants of Stratton Michael and Tasborough petitioned that he might have the fruits of both these adjoining parishes (*S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, lxxi, 50). He was ejected in 1662 and for some time resided in Amsterdam. Richard Lawrence died at Stepney in 1702.

³ Lawrence, *Gospel-separation separated*, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 50 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶ Denham, *Works*, 73.

gawdy nor stripped stark-naked." He is rather one "that loves both Law and Gospell . . . one that is equally as much afraid of the meddling severe clergy of New England, as of the ambitious pragmatick clergy of old England."¹ Moderate men, and they alone, can redeem England from the evil courses into which imperious spirits have led her.

This point of view, nurtured by the disillusionment that inevitably followed two decades of factional conflict, had come by 1660 to tincture the thought even of the Presbyterians. John Corbet, writing shortly after the Restoration, reflected that the temper of the nation had undergone a profound transformation since the outbreak of the Civil War. All thinking men have been obliged to abandon the ideal of a Christian uniformity sustained by compulsive agencies. History has imposed upon England the necessity of settling religion and government according to the counsels of the moderate temper.² Corbet reminded England that the late Lord Protector, though a usurper, had gained remarkable political strength because he made his government synonymous with the twin principles of moderation and stability. He shrewdly realized that the people of England "were glad of some present ease, and generally desired nothing more than to lye down in rest and peace."³ The great religious parties, Anglicanism and Presbyterianism, have been sobered and chastened by three decades of conflict; both must in the interests of survival concede that toleration and not supremacy forms the only reasonable and Christian basis for a permanent settlement of religion. They are the "two middle parties" that must "draw up and close together" in a tolerant and comprehensive definition of faith designed to shelter all the temperate and tolerant spirits in the realm.

It is the peculiar and perhaps inherent weakness of the moderate philosophy that it fails to assert itself and to offer a platform upon which heroic and determined men can stand united in the face of a bigoted and extremist opposition. It was

¹ [Povey], *The moderator*, 18.

² C[orbet], J[ohn], *The second part of the interest of England, in the matter of religion, etc.* (L., 1660), 65.

³ C[orbet], J[ohn], *The interest of England in the matter of religion, etc.* (L., 1660), 6.

abundantly demonstrated in England in the seventeenth century, as it has been so often since, that two ably led and highly vocal extremist minorities can plunge a nation into the maelstrom of a war which engulfs the liberal point of view really expressive of the nation's position. Yet it was evident in England very early in the crisis that the two extremes were by the grinding friction of war to wear away their own cutting edges of fanaticism. Hence a plaintive but insistent cry was heard that men of tolerant temper must demand and gain the right to live their own lives and worship in their own way. God requires, Thomas Moore wrote in 1654, that those who believe in Him and worship Him lead a quiet and a good life, even when they are surrounded by evil and intolerant men.¹ Men of a moderate disposition will live with "quietness, patience, and confidence . . . waiting for the accomplishment of God's Word, and His own bringing to pass the good things He hath promised in His own time and way."² Such men will rest patiently, content in the search for knowledge, confident that God's truth will prevail without the employment of the carnal weapons of force and persecution.³ Men of this temper realize that the way of true religion is one of tolerance and compassion. They are at peace in their hearts so long as they are certain that their own feet are in that path which leads to a true understanding of God. Of one thing they will be very sure: that "a pretended sanctity from the teeth outward, with the frequent mention of the spirit, and a presumptuous assuming to our selves of the stile of saints, when we are within full of subtilty, malice, oppression . . . and diverse lusts" is the certain indication that we are not in that way.⁴ The way to heaven is bathed in the tears of the faithful, not in the blood of the oppressed. Throughout the Christian world, another writer urged, the dread spectre of persecution and of war bred by persecution endangers peace

¹ Moore, Thomas, *Mercies for men*. . . . *Likewise some directions for, and concerning Christian magistrates, etc.* (L., 1654), 78-79. We are not able even tentatively to identify this interesting writer. There seems to be little justification for the suggestion that he was a weaver, resident in Wells. There were four or five men of this name from Oxford and five or six from Cambridge who, so far as age and profession are concerned, could have written the tract.

² *Ibid.*, 88.

³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴ Vaughan, *Works*, I, 182.

and religion. It is time, high time, to secure "a reconcilment of differences in religion . . . the body and cases of all Protestants being made one and the same, their unitie may be their strength," and their religion may be their preservation.¹

The Christian quiet which moderate men require can be gained only by a complete denunciation of the temper and rigorous courses of the bigoted. Tolerant men will firmly oppose the "noise, clamour, or stir, that is made either in proclaiming men's own goodness, or in crying up this and that order, worship or precepts of men, or in crying down and clamouring others."² The moderate Christian will ever recognize that coercion cannot possibly advance Christ's Kingdom and that men are disposed to brand as heretical that which they do not understand. Most of the divisions that have laid the Church in ruins are concerned with non-essentials of faith that are mutable and unworthy of controversy.³ We have incurred the awful guilt of narrowing the gateway to salvation which Christ has left broad and free.⁴

These liberal thinkers generally entertained the view that the Christian communions were in agreement on the fundamentals of faith and hence regarded persecution for religious differences with a peculiar horror. An absolute uniformity of belief is neither possible nor desirable, particularly since the minor differences separating the Christian sects are of no especial consequence. "The eyes are not incensed against the feet for not seeeng [*sic*]; nor doth the ear commence a quarrell with the hands for not hearing."⁵ No more should one sect condemn another for the peculiarity which it has added to the organic body of faith held by both. The fundamentals of faith

¹ *Motives to induce the Protestant princes to mind the worke of peace ecclesiasticall amongst themselves* (L., 1641), 5.

² Moore, *Mercies for men*, 90.

³ C[ollop], J[ohn], *Medici Catholicon, or a Catholick medicine for the diseases of charitie* (L., 1656), 56 ff. Collop, who was born in 1625, was a native of Bedfordshire. He was educated at Cambridge and was apparently a physician. In a collection of poems published in 1656 he indicated his close sympathy with and implied an acquaintanceship with moderates like Ussher and Hammond. The *Medici Catholicon* was republished in 1667 under a variant title.

⁴ *EIPHNIKON, a poeme wherein is perswaded the composing of the differences of all the faithfull in Christ Iesus* (L., 1656), 19.

⁵ Collop, *Medici Catholicon*, 39-40.

are so explicit that every Christian can easily comprehend them,¹ and are so universally entertained that we occasionally forget their basic significance. No more can be required than belief that the Bible is the Word of God and the perfect rule of our faith. Everything that is necessary for our salvation is clearly set out in the Apostles' Creed and is actually professed by every Christian sect.² Surely all reasonable and Christian men will agree that as the general laws of nature should not be violated by particular laws, so the "fundamentall points in religion, which command generall love to God and man, should [not] be neglected for particular differences" which separate the sects.³

The lay mind was growing impatient with the niceties of dogmatic definition and distrustful of the rigid metaphysics of the theologians. It was apparent to the layman that there was a common substance of Christianity in all communions and that this central unity was being destroyed by the clerical insistence upon creeds and forms. One moderate writer staunchly maintained that there were in his opinion just two groups of men: Christians and antichristians. The Christians, he suggested, are one no matter how they "are now separated one from another, by names and opinions." They are all of the fellowship of Christ "and are thereby all imbarqu't in one ship, and must all sink or swim together."⁴ Surely Christians faced by a common danger will be able to unite upon the faith which binds them despite inconsequential differences of opinion.⁵ The schismatic violence which has for so long divided them has no other source than the presumptuous desire of impious men to add glosses of their own fabrication to the fundamentals of faith. All of the sects agree upon these essentials, but each

¹ Freher, Philip, *A treatise touching the peace of the Church, etc.* (L., 1646), 9. A rather careful search has failed to establish any certain data regarding this author.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

³ Plattes, Gabriel, *Practicall husbandry improved, or a discovery of infinite treasure, etc.* (L., 1656), Pref. Plattes was one of the pioneers in the movement which began at about this date for improved agricultural methods. Samuel Hartlib assisted him financially in several of his experiments and publications. Little notice seems to have been taken of his proposals and Plattes died destitute in London during the Commonwealth.

⁴ Lawrence, Richard, *The antichristian presbyter: or, Antichrist transformed, etc.* (L., 1647), 19.

⁵ EIPHNKON, 17.

intolerantly insists upon imposing its own "inferences and interpretations" as well.¹ Christendom has become engrossed in devastating disputes and in the pursuit of trifles which make it appear "as ridiculous, and childish, as for boyes to fall together by the eares, and teare one anothers clothes, and give one another bloudy noses about cherry-stones, points, pinnes, and other trifles which they play for."² This evil disposition has made a mockery of the ideal of Christian unity and a slaughter-house of a continent which denominates itself Christian.

Unity of faith may instantly be restored when Christians are brought to the realization that all who agree in the fundamentals are actually one in faith. Tolerance and charity will flow immediately from this persuasion. No man will then commit the awful sin of persecuting another as an heretic even for an error in an important matter of faith.³ Only the tolerance and forbearance which Christ has required of us are necessary for the attainment of the substantial agreement which lies within our easy grasp. Even in the Apostolic Church gross and dangerous errors were tolerated in order to preserve that precious unity of the spirit. Much more does it behoove us, in an age rife with sectarian zeal and uncertainty, to go slowly in destroying that unity by arrogant and fallible accusations of heresy.⁴ Whoever assumes for himself the power of judging and punishing heresy shatters the fragile essence of unity, persecutes Christ, and mires himself in awful and irremediable sin. Persecution is the last great enemy of Christianity, standing grim guard like an hideous dragon before the broad door of unity, tolerance, and peace.

The minor moderate theorists attacked with vigour and bitter anger the theory and practice of religious persecution. Their position accurately reflects the conviction which a century of religious controversy and a generation of intense spiritual conflict had wrought in the lay mind in England, that persecution could serve no other end than the destruction of the state

¹ Freher, *Treatise touching the peace of the Church*, 28-29.

² Plattes, *Practicall husbandry*, Pref.

³ Freher, *Treatise touching the peace of the Church*, 31.

⁴ Lawrence, *Gospel-separation separated*, 67.

and the ruin of the church. England had risen in arms to throw off the yoke of one persecution. But, Lawrence enquired, have the orthodox, men like Prynne and Bastwick, who now labour to contrive a new conformity, forgotten the cross under which they staggered so recently?¹ Has all moderation and reason fled, the *Moderate Intelligencer* demanded? Not long since, England would have been content with a chastened prelacy, or at least with the suppression of open and scandalous sin.² But orthodoxy feeds upon zeal and intolerance; its appetite is quickened into a devouring hunger simply by the taste of success. For now Calvinism in its turn demands the ruin of its enemies and the exaltation of its own Genevan intolerance. In consequence England is torn with ruinous dissension, the clergy manœuvre and haggle, and the extremists demand the blood of their enemies while the people perish for want of instruction. These men of wilful temper know nothing of Christ's Kingdom, for the faith of Christ builds and does not destroy.³ Christ has commanded His followers to eschew all violent courses and to ignore all error save perhaps the most "horrid and hideous kind of blasphemies and insurrection." Force is, in fact, repugnant to the essence of Christ's teachings. England must learn, and that quickly, that compulsion violates the majesty of the human conscience and that it cannot "procure any true, Christian, sound reformation and edification of the Church; but rather instead . . . shall cause a most pernicious schisme" and the ruin of the Church.⁴

A condition which is endemic in the Christian world has become epidemic in England. Men have lost all sense of proportion and have assumed an infallible knowledge and a complete sovereignty in matters in which they have neither competence nor certainty of understanding. Men who undertake to render judgment in questions of faith declare themselves to be not only equal to "but above the Lord in point of knowledge."⁵ We have been so zealous in overthrowing others whom

¹ Lawrence, *Antichristian presbyter*, 5-8.

² *Moderate Intelligencer*, March 19, 1646.

³ Lawrence, *Antichristian presbyter*, 16.

⁴ Freher, *Treatise touching the peace of the Church*, 55.

⁵ *An essay toward the composing of present differences in ecclesiasticks*, etc. (L., 1650), 16.

we regard as in error that we have ourselves fallen into the dread error of persecution. We have sought to limit precisely and rigidly the confines of truth and to impose our interpretations upon other men by coercive prescription. Thus even the great reformers, men like Luther and Calvin, insisted with so much harshness upon the exclusive truth of their own judgment in religion that they counted it "a great impiety to depart a finger's breadth from their tenets" and levied brutal war with every fiendish weapon that lay within their reach upon those who dissented from their views.¹ This rage of persecution has spread through all the world and our monstrous limitations upon truth have become ever narrower. Frenzied orthodoxy has charged God with being "a false spirit in not keeping to that compasse of truth and holinesse, wherein we would circumscribe Him," as if He were "nothing more vast, more comprehensive then our conceits."² The church has strayed so far from the gentleness and tolerance of Christ's teachings that one may legitimately enquire whether it has not entered the camp of those who wage war on Him.

The persecuting tendencies of organized churches have been vastly enhanced by the Protestant Reformation and by the divisive tendency inherent in Protestantism. The several sects have exerted their most determined efforts to prevent men from seeking truth freely. No church that seizes the thorny staff of persecution can condemn its rivals when they adopt the same rigorous measures.³ The world has been stricken with a madness, conceived in ignorance and nourished in sin, which would crucify the Christian conscience and pervert the meaning of Christ's Gospel. This awful sin must be charged against the persecutors, whether they be Protestant or Catholic. These

Brevis disquisitio: or, a brief inquiry touching a better way then is commonly made use of, to refute Papists, and reduce Protestants to certainty and unity in religion ([L., 1653]), in *Phenix*, II, 319. This interesting tract, which exhibits certain Socinian characteristics, was popularly attributed to John Hales. It may certainly be said that he was not the author (Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 403), nor was it probably the work of Joachim Stegman as the British Museum Catalogue would indicate. Stylistic and textual peculiarities would suggest that John Biddle was the author of the pamphlet, though any attribution must at the present time be most tentative.

² *Essay toward the composing of present differences*, 17.

³ *Brevis disquisitio*, *Phenix*, II, 344-345.

arrogant spirits must answer the cry of the oppressed: "Are yee indeed gods and not men . . . precisely and punctually to determine what's truth, what error?"¹ These wilful men must be made conscious of the hideous possibility that they persecute truth while they are themselves enmeshed in error. They must be persuaded that "uncharitable zeal our reason whets, and double edges on our passion sets."² They must be brought to the realization that if other men are "dimmer, duller, and weaker-sighted" than they, it effects no cure to "beat and buffet better eyes into them." They must learn, lest the world and religion perish, the elementary lessons of tolerance and charity.

The moderate thinkers were so gravely disturbed by the threat which renewed intolerance offered to freedom and reason in England that they girded themselves to attack frontally the entrenched position of the orthodox. In vigorous and honest language they demanded of the godly whether they sought to knock those who erred "on the head to bring them back to sight. . . . Are you Gods? Why do not your words expressly, as well as your actions tacitly tell us so? But are you men? Why then assume you such titles, and take such courses?"³ The intolerant spirits have ever sought to woo men to Christ with the deadly cudgel of persecution in hand.⁴ They have sat as gods in the temple of the Lord, ruling or ruining the consciences of men and devastating the fair province of God's mercy.⁵

This is the low estate to which the rage of persecution has brought the Church of God. And yet, those who seek the destruction of the heretic do so upon no other authority than their own fallible and tyrannous judgment. "If thou or any that tells them it is lawfull to destroy men for not believing," Lawrence protested, "can but shew me out of the Word of God, where the time, place, or person, where, Christ or the Apostles, or any after them . . . did endeavour by any outward compulsion to force men to believe, or punish any further then

¹ *Essay toward the composing of present differences*, 19.

² Denham, *Works*, 119.

³ *Essay toward the composing of present differences*, 20.

⁴ *EIPHNIKON*, 19.

⁵ *Essay toward the composing of present differences*, 20-21.

excommunication," a new religion will have been established by that proof.¹ But it is not true: even the persecutors are driven to admit in theory that which they violate in practice. Reason and persuasion are the only instruments that will win a man to Christ. Men must be convinced by reason, not convicted by law; they must be won by gentleness, not driven by the harsh lash of persecution. The intolerant man sins not only against the sanctity of human conscience but against the dictates of common sense. For error, quite as certainly as truth, has its martyrs. In noble and flaming words, Collop reminded the intolerant that "the Norfolk Arian could laugh at the stake; and though none can dye well who live not so; no one can live so ill as cannot dye desperately . . . I would bring tears to quench, rather than fewell to the flames; not cause others to be disembowelled, but could even disembowell my selfe by an inviscerate dilection."²

These men spoke of persecution with convictions that had been tempered by the heat and passion of recent historical experience. They exhibited an almost physical reaction to the cruelty and sadism implicit in religious coercion and they, like so many other quietly determined men in England, had dedicated themselves to its destruction. These little-known men exhibit with striking clarity the growth of a hard, keen, and courageous lay spirit which already possessed all but sufficient strength to call an end to a theory of the religious society which, though posited on one of the noblest of the ideals that has swayed the mind of man, was pregnant with danger and ruin for the modern world. These men had embraced the theory of religious toleration upon the solid double grounds of right and necessity.

Any religion which is true, the moderates insisted, does not require the assistance of the arms of violence. "Truth . . . is a most strong weapon, and doth most speedily strike, and overcome the heart that is desirous of it."³ Christianity possesses in the gentle and tolerant life of its Founder the perfect rule of its conduct towards those who oppose it. When any church takes up the temporal weapons of its adversaries it

¹ Lawrence, *Antichristian presbyter*, 17.

² Collop, *Medici Catholicon*, 125.

³ *Brevis disquisitio*, *Phenix*, II, 346.

suggests by that very act the probability that it is not a true Church. The Church, then, must use those spiritual resources with which it has been endowed, resting secure in the certain knowledge that the triumph of the truth which it professes will inevitably follow. Such a communion of saints will require and ask nothing of the civil magistrate save that he afford to believers "liberty and protection in their quiet and peaceable worshipping of God, and endeavouring the good to others, according as the grace of God that brings salvation to all men, instructeth them."¹ The true Church, in fact, will not be zealously evangelical, much less tyrannous, in disseminating the divine truth with which it is seised. It will rest serenely secure in the knowledge that its message must prevail; it will content itself with the quiet and sober demonstration of the good life which it professes to inculcate. Nothing more than this is required for the attainment of the Kingdom of Christ.

Above all else the Church of Christ will be scrupulously tolerant. It will "set up no Lords in the room of Christ, over the consciences of men, nor . . . disturb them in their quiet and peaceable service of Him . . . or limit them therein."² The temperate Christian will despise those who seek to make their judgments absolute, and will extend to all men that liberty which the health of his own faith requires.³ He will strive with every resource at his command to keep the Church in this later age as comprehensive and tolerant as Christ left it. He will seek in his own life to exhibit that tolerance and magnanimity which constitute the essence of Christianity. The Christian will reflect that all men hold their religion, even though it be erroneous, in conscience and will hence carefully avoid offending those who differ from him. He will recall that the pious Romanist regards the Protestant as deluded, that the Jew is persuaded that both are mad, that the Turk is convinced that all three are deranged, while "doth not a learned pagan thinke the like by all the rest, being himselfe madder then any of them?"⁴ The Christian has no instrumentality for dealing with those men who differ so

¹ Moore, *Mercies for men*, 113-114.

² *Ibid.*, 114.

³ *Kingdome Weekly Intelligencer*, June 2, 1646.

⁴ Plattes, *Practicall husbandry*, Pref.

completely from him save by reason which is common to all men. The Christian Church, therefore, will carefully avoid violating the law of nature, which grants to every man the sacred right of reasonable conviction, by the too vigorous prosecution of a truth which seems manifest to it. If that truth is manifest, it will surely prevail of its own weight and self-evident beauty. Certainly it does not require the hideous devices of persecution which destroy its essence and pervert it into an impious fraud.

Tolerance and humility, then, are inseparable attributes of true faith. The Christian is so deeply conscious of his own short-comings, so painfully aware of the dark voids of his own knowledge, that he grants to all other men the precious franchise of religious freedom. Truth and error are often so interwoven, men are so quickly and miraculously converted from heresy to truth, that no sane man would dare judge the conscience of another. "Be not over-curious in prying into the faults of others, nor too rash in censuring them," a moderate writer admonished, "for though they have not proceeded so far as thyself in the performance of externall duties, yet they may suddenly be converted, and exceed thee."¹ We are infallibly commanded to permit the tares to grow undisturbed. Experience has amply demonstrated that no course can be taken for the destruction of heresy that does not in the end destroy truth instead.² We must be scrupulous in leaving to God all judgment in this matter. We must ever reflect, too, that the rigidity of the church of the Jews was superseded by the elasticity of the gospel, which was intended for all nations and which has as its central motif a marvellous latitude.³ The sin of Christian history has consisted of an intolerant and sacrilegious disposition on the part of fallible men to limit and crystallize that which Christ has left broad and fluid.

The Kingdom of Christ cannot be attained until we are prepared to allow absolute freedom of conscience and worship to all men who profess Christ and who seek a larger knowledge of His truth. Those men who take refuge in the "dark caverns" of tradition and those firebrands who follow every

¹ *The pathway to peace and truth, with holinesse, etc.* ([L.], 1646), s.sh.

² Moore, *Mercies for men*, 115.

³ *Moderate Intelligencer*, April 2, 1646.

will-o'-the-wisp of doctrine are the true disturbers of the golden moderation characteristic of Christianity. But most dangerous to the Church are those who, infected with the poison of infallibility, seek to impose their private delusions upon mankind. These are the persecutors who would give men the Bible with the one hand and snatch it away with the other; these are the arrogant spirits who "bid a man look upon the sun diall, but trust not to the sun, but candle-light."¹ These are the intolerant spirits who repudiate by their every action the reasonable persuasion which the apostles declared to be the only instrument by which humanity could be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. Control of the church must be wrested from these incendiaries by the moderate Christians, whose true home it is. All men must be permitted to walk in peace in those things upon which they agree, awaiting the pleasure of God for the clarification of those obscure matters upon which they differ.² Both church and state must "afford liberty and protection . . . unto all that do profess or pretend to desire to worship, acknowledge, and serve God in Christ according to His Word or Scriptures."³ We dare not force men from a living faith which may, despite our fallible judgment, be sufficient for their salvation, into a dead and empty form of our own contrivance.⁴ Held firm by the anchor of our own faith against the lashing waves of heresy, we will rest patiently until God in His own time and manner quiets the breakers which beat fruitlessly against the Church.

The attainment of religious toleration would be a priceless benefit to both the state and church. Religious discord would be ended and the state no longer exposed to the dangers bred by fanatical and desperate men. When animosity is laid aside, when we are able to look with calm detachment upon all communions, we will discover that there are countless saints of God in every sect. We will even learn that in the most despised of all the sectarian groups, the Anabaptists, there are many men who merit our esteem and who are worthy of

¹ *Essay toward the composing of present differences*, 16.

² *Ibid.*, 26.

³ Moore, *Mercies for men*, 119.

⁴ We dare not "force upon men the entertainment of Jesus Christ, the truth and the truths of Jesus with fire and sword." (*Essay toward the composing of present differences*, 30-31.)

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our tolerance. The author of *EIPHNIKON* admonished his readers with more humour and tolerance than metre:

“What though some weak ones in the water fall,
Be modest brother, do not censure all.
Look but amongst them with impartial eyes,
You’le find ther’s many godly, sober, wise,
And if the Lord continue truth and peace,
’Tis probable their number will encrease.
John Leydens tale, which serves at every turn,
Hath been so much abus’d its thred-bare worn.”¹

We will speedily learn in an atmosphere of moderation to regard all who profess the name of Christ as members of the Invisible Church upon which we all repose the hope of our salvation. John Collop, the author of that remarkable tract, *Medici Catholicon*, confessed that he had attained this moderate temper: “I can joyn prayers with a papist,” he wrote, “if his be offensive to God, mine may bee pleasing; [I] can hear a French Hugonot with his hat on, uncover’d; receive with a Dutchman kneeling, while he uses the irreverence of his breech; yet separated in my charity from neither: nor would I be in my mode rather then scandalize any.”²

The Christian world has delayed the attainment of religious liberty for too long. The desperate straits into which England has fallen must indicate as does the crisis of a fever that the disease of persecution has run its course and that the nation will shortly regain the health and sanity of Christian moderation. After its terrible experience the Christian conscience of the nation is surely prepared to extend liberty and protection “to all such as are quiet in the land; and in so doing, they shall certainly be a protection, defence and shadow . . . unto Gods people that do rightly worship Him.”³ This is the lesson of peace, humility, and gentle tolerance which England must gain from the bestiality of a war nourished by intolerance and greed. This is the lesson which men of good will and temperate heart have ever taught; this is the confirmation of the dispassionate spirit which has alone preserved them against the ravages of a fratricidal war. If they fail, if the counsels of

¹ *EIPHNIKON*, 20–21.

² Collop, *Medici Catholicon*, 56.

³ Moore, *Mercies for men*, 120.

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moderation are swept aside, the tolerant man will at least have preserved sufficient integrity to exclaim:

"They fouled the fountains, peace died gasping there,
Glooms wept above and veiled heaven's glittering air.
But, honour led me, and a pious heart:
In this great ravenous heat I had no part;
It was my faith, that guiltless blood will cry
Aloud, and has a power which does not die.

So never with wild insult did I smite
The holy down; my heart and hand were white.
Forbear, O friend, to ask me more than this;
Let the wise weigh my words; the fool may miss."¹

C. THE CAMBRIDGE PLATONISTS, 1640-1660

I. THE GENERAL NATURE OF THE THOUGHT OF THE PLATONISTS

The Cambridge Platonists display few characteristics which separate them from the Moderates whose thought we have surveyed. However, since they were very closely united by personal ties and since their thought possesses an inherent unity, it will be convenient to treat them as a group. We shall likewise observe that the Cambridge thinkers were direct heirs of the Oxford Moderates, who, during the generation prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, had contributed so fruitfully to the development of Latitudinarian thought in England. In so far as religious toleration is concerned, the stream of development was unbroken when the brilliant group of Cambridge fellows grasped the torch of Christian humanism from the broken hands of the older Latitudinarians.

The Platonists were the true successors of Falkland and his group. One is far more impressed by the rare temper of their mind than by the actual content of their philosophical or religious contribution. In a period when England was divided into two warring camps they were able to preserve a charitable tolerance, to maintain a philosophical detachment, and to guard scrupulously the moderate tradition of which they were

¹ Vaughan, Henry, *Olor Iscanus* (L., 1651), Prefix, in Blunden, Edmund, *On the Poems of Henry Vaughan, etc.* (L., 1927), 9-10.

heirs. Drawn principally from Puritan families, nurtured in the most zealously Puritan college in Cambridge, they early emancipated themselves from the rigours of Calvinistic doctrine and sought to define a broad and tolerant Church that would preserve the finest traditions of Anglicanism while accommodating the moral revolution already wrought by Puritanism.¹ They endowed man with high attributes and invested him with a divine nature. This judgment concerning the nature of man may be said to underlie their fine insistence upon complete liberty for every reasonable human being and it placed them in solid opposition to Hobbes, who, surely, of all philosophers, had the lowest view of human nature. They were wholly tolerant in their religious position. While tending to favour a chastened episcopacy, they insisted that other forms and other communions must be granted an unqualified religious freedom.² Reasonable and charitable in temper, tolerant and dispassionate in conduct, the Platonists were able to couch their thought upon a lofty plane and to detach themselves from the bitter struggle which was laying waste church and state in England.

The Cambridge Moderates were to contribute far more substantially to the development of religious toleration than to philosophy. Their philosophical thought is confused, wants a central focus, and is weakened by a tendency to escape into the ethereal realms of mysticism. Writing in the shadow of the colossus Hobbes, their thought seems immature and upon occasion childishly shrill in its protest against the naked power of Hobbesian speculation. Their thought likewise suffers from the fact that though they read widely and conversed brilliantly they wrote little. As Nairne has aptly said, "The Cambridge vice has ever been that scholars read, think, teach, accumulate, talk; and leave no finished work behind."³ They owed most to Plotinus, evidencing no more than an incomplete understanding of the greater ancient philosophers. They were well

¹ Campagnac, E. T., *The Cambridge Platonists, etc.* (Oxford, 1901), Intro., xiii.

² Ranke, Leopold v., *A History of England principally in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1875), VI, 48.

³ Nairne, A., *The Cambridge Platonists*, in *Church Quarterly Review*, CI (1925-1926), 213.

acquainted with the works of Bacon and two of them were somewhat influenced by the brilliant and revolutionary contributions which Descartes was making to contemporary thought. But, Culverwel aside, they display an almost naïve ignorance of the advanced thought of their own age; they were, in fact, rather more concerned with the resolution of the problems of the age of faith than with the exploration of the illimitable frontiers of knowledge which science and rationalism were opening up.

As neo-Platonists the Cambridge Moderates taught that the spiritual man sees and feels with a finer and sharper perception than does the carnal man. Deeply conscious of the inroads which indifference and scepticism were making into institutional religion, they sought refuge in the Platonic doctrine of ideas and endeavoured to stay the process of sectarian deterioration by creating a broad and tolerant base upon which religion might re-create itself. Though they frequently wrote in mystical language, they were in reality dedicated to the conviction that faith is gained and evidenced by reason, by moral conduct, and by charity rather than by ecstasy.¹ Though they reflect the style and terminology of the neo-Platonists, the Cambridge thinkers were in fact Christo-centric. They drew far more heavily from the Bible than from Plato and they founded their philosophical system upon the conviction that man may by his reason gain a large and sufficient knowledge of divine truth.

From Platonism, however, the Cambridge Moderates derived their primary doctrine of reason. They made of reason the supreme guide in questions of faith and in the pursuit of religious and philosophical truth. Even faith, they declared, "was the mind's assent to the evidence, intuitional or inferential, which reason brought forward."² No faith that is not undergirded by reason can be regarded as worthy of the dignity of the human race. Man, they held, in contradiction to Hobbes, is essentially good, having been endowed with a "natural light" which is his most certain guide and which can alone bring him to a saving knowledge of God. The self-evident truths of religion have been implanted in every man by God, and it is his high duty to enlarge and fructify the precious

¹ Powicke, *Cambridge Platonists*, 20.

² *Ibid.*, 27.

capacities with which he has been endowed. The light of natural reason has through the ages grown dim, but it has been implemented by the scriptures which, when interpreted reasonably, provide a fuller and a nobler understanding of our duty to man and of our obedience to God. From the scriptures, above all else, humanity has gained a code of moral conduct which raises it above the beasts and which is the distinguishing mark of the religious man. "The moral part of religion never alters," Whichcote wrote. "Moral laws are laws of themselves, without sanction by will; and the necessity of them arises from the things themselves. All other things in religion are in order to these. The moral part of religion does sanctify the soul; and is final both to what is instrumental and instituted."¹ Everything—the corpus of Protestant dogma, and even the Bible itself—the Platonists subjected to the tests of reason and morality. It was this sturdy philosophical detachment which "gave them that toleration and comprehensiveness of view that characterized their attitude to the dissensions of their time."² Secure in a warm and luminous faith, the Cambridge Platonists invited all men to subject Christianity to the test of reason and demanded that intolerance and persecution be repudiated if they could not withstand the probing diagnosis of reasonable and moral criticism.

The Cambridge Platonists evidence, as does moderate thought as a whole, the rapid disintegration of orthodox Calvinism in England. We have commented at length upon the disillusionment which swept across England directly it became apparent that the condition of a Calvinistic National Establishment was to be a rigid and intolerant church.³ The repudiation of orthodoxy was a complex development which we have previously examined with some care. Many men embraced extreme sectarianism in protest, religious indifference spread apace, Erastianism was enormously strengthened, and the moderate conviction, almost careless of doctrinal propriety, developed with amazing rapidity: all of these facets of rebellion against

¹ Whichcote, Benjamin, *Moral and religious aphorisms, etc.* (ed. by Samuel Salter) (L., 1753), §221.

² Hough, W. E., *The Religious Philosophy of John Smith, etc.*, in *Baptist Quarterly*, III (1927), 357.

³ Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 64-118, 347 ff.

dogmatic harshness were brought into effective focus by a common devotion to the principle of religious toleration. The Cambridge Moderates were in a sense the intellectual exponents of a movement that was steadily eroding the granite walls of orthodoxy. It is not surprising that in their quest for institutional roots they were to draw very heavily indeed upon the Arminian position and upon the thought of the Latitudinarians, who were their immediate predecessors.¹ It is particularly significant that this liberalization of doctrine and this remarkably tolerant view of religious differences was to develop at the university which for two generations had been the centre of the intellectual development of Puritanism.²

Though Whichcote denied that he had read the works of the great Arminians, it is apparent that he and his colleagues drew heavily from the Remonstrant philosophy. The Platonists held a view concerning divine love, the general efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, the nature of grace, the necessity for morality, and the ill-consequences of the doctrine of predestination which is all but indistinguishable from the Remonstrant teachings.³ They attacked the doctrine of predestination unequivocally as an insult to the dignity of man, as a blasphemy upon the mercy of God, and as the source for most of the intolerance that had disgraced Protestant history.⁴ But it is their defence of tolerance and of the sovereignty of the individual soul which binds the Platonists most intimately with the Arminians and with the Latitudinarians, who had so recently sought by every means available to reasonable and gentle men to avert religious war in England by the exposition of the principles of Christian humanism.

¹ Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 319-421.

² Gardiner, S. R., *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, etc.* (L., 1903), IV, 22.

³ Powicke, *Cambridge Platonists*, 36-37.

⁴ Whichcote wrote, "Do not think, God has done any thing concerning thee; before thou camest into being: whereby thou art determined, either to sin or misery. This is a falsehood: and they, that entertain such thoughts, live in a lie." (*Moral and religious aphorisms*, §811.) More's argument was even stronger. He submitted that though he were predestined to hell, he would none the less "behave . . . patiently and obediently" towards God. He would scrupulously perform the Word of God, who could scarcely condemn him to hell for long. (More, Henry, *Henrici Mori Cantabrigiensis opera omnia, etc.* [L., 1675], Pref.)

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It is remarkable that the Cambridge group failed to establish an organic identity with the Oxford Moderates who immediately preceded them. Even before the influence of the Latitudinarians had been dissipated by the shock of war the Cambridge thinkers had laid the foundations of their general position. It is true that the Cambridge Platonists were more searching in their enquiries and that their thought was spread on a larger canvas of speculation. Their temper, as Tulloch has pointed out, was philosophical, whereas the great Latitudinarians had been intensely secular in the structure of their thought. But on many fronts the Platonists' reasoning stems from the same position as that of the Oxford thinkers and the weight of their conclusions is remarkably similar.¹ Both groups embraced reason and both were genuinely devoted to religious liberty. Both were inclined to lend their support to a comprehensive Church which would be fabricated from the sturdy timbers of universally accepted fundamentals of faith. Both were disposed to favour a limited episcopacy for the government of that Church, while professing disinterest as to its form and discipline. Both groups insisted carefully that the essentials of doctrine are few and that they must by definition be intelligible to all reasonable men directly the blinding scales of compulsion of conscience have finally been removed. These moderates, whether of Oxford or Cambridge, represent the noblest and most lofty strain of English religious thought.

2. BENJAMIN WHICHCOTE, 1609-1683

Whichcote, the leading spirit in the illustrious Emmanuel College group, was born in Shropshire in 1609. He was educated at Emmanuel College, where he proceeded B.A. in 1629, M.A. in 1633, and B.D. in 1640. He was ordained a priest in 1636 at a time when the Laudian repression was at its height and when the religious divisions in England were hardening before the eyes of the protesting moderates. Whichcote in the year of his ordination began the famous series of afternoon sermons in Trinity Church which were to lay the foundations of his leadership and which were to outline with

¹ Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy*, II, 6-7.

mature and daring strokes the intellectual basis of the humanistic protest against the prevailing intolerance and the dogmatic inflexibility of the era. Whichcote continued his sermons for twenty years, slowly knitting together a system of thought which was to exercise a dominant influence upon the intellectual life of the university and firmly to establish his leadership of the distinguished group of which he was the oldest member.¹ He preached freely and colloquially without manuscript, with an almost contemptuous disregard for reputation and posterity. Our incomplete knowledge of his sermons is gained only from the notes taken at the time by his devoted auditors.² In 1644 Whichcote was appointed Provost of King's College; he did not desire the post nor would he subscribe to the Covenant to obtain it. He lived quietly in Cambridge throughout the revolutionary period, writing little, but profoundly influencing numerous men through his rare capacities as a tutor. Deprived at the time of the Restoration, Whichcote removed to London, where he preached until shortly before his death in 1683.

Whichcote was a man of remarkable, indeed, of complete tolerance. Salter tells us that he deliberately sought to free himself from the dogmatic slavery of his generation and to secure the "spreading and propagating [of] a nobler freer and more generous sett of opinions."³ Regarding the fanatical enthusiasm of his age as destructive of religion and learning, he endeavoured to rid himself as completely as possible from the claims of any sectarian communion.⁴ He sought to expound a tolerant and a moderate view of Christianity and "shed round him an influence more powerful than any school, an influence dissolvent of the systems—Laudian or Calvinistic—which confronted him on either hand."⁵ Moreover, in his own life and conduct, as well as in his thought, the great moderate exemplified the virtues of tolerance, charity, and reasonableness which during a troubled era he preached with such good-tempered insistence. Tillotson in his famous funeral

¹ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, xxii–xxiii.

² *Ibid.*, x–xii.

³ *Ibid.*, xx.

⁴ Whichcote, Benjamin, *Eight letters of Dr. Antony Tuckney, and Dr. Benjamin Whichcote, etc.* (ed. by Samuel Salter) (L., 1753), Pref., xxii.

⁵ Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, IV, 23.

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sermon has written that his friend's conversation had been "exceeding kind and affable, grave and winning, prudent and profitable." He was slow in forming his judgment and moderate in declaring it, while his manner was never marred by passion or arrogance. Though Whichcote was possessed of a "most profound and well-poised judgment; yet was he, of all men . . . the most patient to hear others differ from him; and the most easy to be convinced, when good reason was offered." His mind, we are informed by Tillotson, remained open, ever eager to submit to reason, ever prepared to progress in the knowledge of truth.¹ Here was a mind abundantly endowed by nature for the achievement of a rich and profound influence; here was a rare spirit which partisan zeal could not poison and which the virulent hatreds spawned by war could not despoil.

The great moderate reposed complete trust in the power of reason to lead men to a sufficient knowledge of religious truth. And, as an important corollary to this undogmatic position, he held that men who were endowed with a rational faith would by definition be tolerant. He followed the earlier Latitudinarians implicitly in the assumption that any man who sought God in good conscience and with clear and unhindered reason would attain a saving truth. While this position is immediately significant for the development of religious toleration, it almost incidentally deals a mortal blow to all dogmatic systems and to the "Church Idea." Religion is thereby reduced to a system of morality; the Church can insist upon no more than generally entertained fundamentals of faith; and religious observance becomes a purely individual matter. These consequences of the exaltation of reason, we may believe, were understood by Whichcote as they certainly were by Hale. But he was so distressed by rigidity and persecution, so appalled by wars and schisms raised in the name of faith, that he was prepared to reduce religious sovereignty into terms of the individual.

There is, Whichcote insisted, no conflict between the requirements of faith and the dignity of human reason. Religion is a temper of mind, a condition in which all the

¹ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, xxx-xxx1.

faculties are in helpful and harmonious relation one to another. No faculty of the mind may be overridden, and of all the faculties reason is the highest and most characteristic of man. The reason, consequently, may not be outraged by the demands of faith.¹ "He that gives reason for what he saith, has done what is fit to be done; and the most that can be done."² The reason therefore supplies an essential element of faith,³ and alone provides the measure and the test of certitude. We may truly say that a "conscience, without judgment, is superstition,"⁴ and we must rest content in that faith which our reason recommends. For reason alone unites all men. We should accordingly discipline ourselves by moderation and contemplation in order to attain a state of mind in which reason may surely guide us. Every article of our faith and every element of our conduct should be submitted to its sovereign discipline since we may be sure that "what has not reason in it, or for it; if held out for religion, is man's superstition: it is not religion of God's making."⁵

Whichcote was very explicit in his estimate of the place which reason should occupy in religion: there were none of the subtle exceptions and evasions that so often mark the seventeenth-century treatment of this question. "We are not," he wrote, "to submit our understandings to the belief of those things, that are contrary to our understandings. We must have a reason, for that which we believe above our reason."⁶ Thus even the luminous perceptions of revelation must be submitted to the sovereign reason. Reason must precede and undergird faith, and faith which does not rest upon it must be denominated superstition.⁷

Religion, in other words, must be lifted out of the realm of the mysterious, be regained from the arrogant and intolerant, and restored to the individual. It should be realized that "religion is rational, accountable, and intelligible."⁸ For there

¹ Whichcote, Benjamin, *The Work of Reason*, in Campagnac, *Cambridge Platonists*, 51-54.

² Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §60.

³ *Ibid.*, §457.

⁴ *Ibid.*, §65.

⁵ *Ibid.*, §102.

⁶ *Ibid.*, §771.

⁷ "If you would be religious, be intelligent and rational in your religion; or else your religion may be only a denomination, and not sovereign to you." (Whichcote, *Work of Reason*, Campagnac, *Cambridge Platonists*, 59.)

⁸ Whichcote, Benjamin, *Select sermons, etc.* (L., 1698; Edinburgh, 1742), 50.

THE LAYMEN AND THE MODERATES

is no other way by which men may attain faith than by the guidance of reason. It would be quite as impious for man to prescribe a religion for God as to enforce a religion upon another.¹ Our belief must be grounded upon the persuasion of our own intelligence. We must realize that if our reason did not apprehend God we could never know Him and hence that reason is antecedent to faith.² Therefore, Whichcote pleaded, "let us lay aside imposing one upon another; or to use any canting in religion. Let us talk sense, and reason."³ Every man will be held directly responsible by God for his own life and faith. Every human being must consequently throw off the yoke of external authority and establish his faith solidly and surely in the granite depths of his own reason.⁴

The supremacy of reason lies at the basis of all true religion. It cannot but be self-evident that "man is not at all settled or confirmed in his religion, until his religion is the selfsame with the reason of his mind; that when he thinks he speaks reason, he speaks religion; or when he speaks religiously, he speaks reasonably."⁵ As religious institutions developed, however, traditions became crystallized and authority invaded the sphere of reason. The Protestant Reformation was provoked by the necessity of freeing the individual reason from the tyranny of coercive authority, and its principles were solidly based upon the sovereignty of the individual judgment. Men were taught that "the names of authors are truly considerable; but the strength of reason is more so,"⁶ and they were afforded liberty in which they might freely seek God and His truth. Since then, however, an older tragedy has been re-enacted. As Protestantism developed, thought froze into institutional forms and reason was fastened to the cross of authority. Hence another reformation, another emancipation of the intellect, must occur which, while it may topple over the hard shell of institutions, will free the reason.

Whichcote held a high view of human nature and repeatedly insisted that man must defend the divinely granted dignity

¹ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §112.

² Whichcote, *Select sermons*, 58.

³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

⁵ Whichcote, Benjamin, *Several discourses, etc.* (ed. by John Jeffery) (L., 1702-1719), IV, 259, et cf. IV, 262-263.

⁶ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §354.

of his intellect. "Man parts with his freedom, and enslaves himself; when he subjects himself to that, which is not sovereign in him; as reason is."¹ God did not make "a sorry worthless piece fit for no use, when He made man." For we are endowed with the noble attribute of reason which is "the divine governor of man's life . . . the very voice of God."² It is reason alone that distinguishes man from the beasts of the field and which enables him to find God. It is therefore the best, nay the only instrument which man possesses for the ascertainment of truth.³ What we cannot do with its aid, we cannot do at all. "Thou hast done thy duty," Whichcote admonished his auditors in one of the Trinity sermons, "when thou hast put forth thy rational proposal: if you move further, it is to your loss; you move, but you do not move forward."⁴ Reason does not persuade men instantly, but its gentle tuition moves them ultimately and surely. For the "truths of God are connatural to the soul of man; and the soul of man makes no more resistance to them, than the air does to light."⁵ Man requires nothing more for the attainment of religious truth than time for consideration, freedom for contemplation, and liberty for conviction. Persuasion is a leisurely intellectual process into which no external authority may rightly intrude. For "a man has as much right to use his own understanding, in judging of truth; as he has a right to use his own eyes, to see his way: therefore it is no offence to another, that any man uses his own right."⁶ Reason and conscience must remain free and we must not be exercised by the "reasonable differences" which ensue, since "those that differ upon reason, may come together by reason."⁷ Truth and right will not be long clouded from our view once our birthright of tolerance and liberty for the free play of reason has been regained.⁸

We should reflect that God has engraved upon the hearts of all men of all ages a moral law that lies at the very basis of Christianity. Christianity is, in fact, simply a fuller and finer elucidation of the code of moral conduct to which natural

¹ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §239, et cf. §315.

² *Ibid.*, §76.

³ *Ibid.*, §786.

⁴ Whichcote, *Several discourses*, IV, 68.

⁵ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §444.

⁶ *Ibid.*, §40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, §58.

⁸ Whichcote, *Several discourses*, IV, 76.

reason persuades us. All great teachers from Plato to Christ have sought to persuade men to the practice of this morality in which the good life consists, and Christianity has opened for men the possibility of attaining the good life whether as individuals or as a society. We are restrained and impeded only by a false conception of religion which has been perpetuated by sacrilegious restraints upon the freedom of the human intellect. It is certainly "no disparagement to the Divine Spirit; that what is pretended to come from it is examined, by reason and scripture,"¹ and it is certainly within the province of mankind to insist that God shall be worshipped in spirit by an informed and understanding mind. There is no heathenish magic in religion; it does not work as a charm. Those who embrace it through coercion, those who accept it ignorantly, and those who prosecute it with intolerant zeal gain nothing whatever from Christianity. Religion "works by illumination, by teaching the reason of man's mind,"² and by the sanctification and unfolding of the natural morality to which every human being is instinctively persuaded.

Whichcote gave a convincing and a noble vindication to the freedom of the human intellect. The validity of our faith must be measured strictly by the dictates of our own judgment, and no human power may rightfully violate the sanctity of that judgment. In substance, Whichcote reduced religion to individual terms and destroyed the possibility of persecution by his elucidation of the nature of faith and morals. Nor was this all. He was fully persuaded of the soundness of the Latitudinarian position that the fundamentals of faith are very few and are clearly revealed to all men by whom they are generally acknowledged. He taught, in brief, that a substantial Christian unity had always existed, which the impious arms of the persecutors had despoiled.

The great Cambridge Moderate had little conception of or concern for the institutional aspects of religion, nor did he care greatly which form the church's dogma and ritual assumed. He was concerned only with calling men's attention to the essentials of religion which, in his judgment, were already

¹ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §1017.

² Whichcote, *Several discourses*, III, 96, 106.

engraved on their hearts. He was determined above all else to free mankind for the pursuit of truth in an atmosphere of tolerance and pervading charity. He apparently distrusted ordered systems and elaborately articulated forms of belief, carefully avoiding imposing them on himself or on his pupils.¹ Any system of creed devised by a man can fit none but him, and him only so long as he does not grow in spiritual stature and knowledge. When any church seeks to impose such a creedal formula it binds the reason, destroys the conscience, and paralyses the pursuit of truth. The true religion, admitting of no infallible visible judge, charges each man with a personal obligation to find truth in his own way.² Since God has planted His essential truths in every man, we violate our own nature when we abandon our reason for authority in the pursuit of that truth.³ The fundamental truths by which we shall be saved are clearly revealed in the Bible; when honest men differ on a matter of creed, *prima facie* evidence of the indifference of the doctrine has thereby been established. Sectarian determinations that lie beyond the clear message of the scriptures "have indeed enlarged faith, but lessened charity and multiplied divisions." Every soul must be permitted absolute liberty to seek truth by the untrammelled guidance of the individual reason. Truth may easily be discovered; reason establishes its subjective validity, while the universal consent of reasonable men confirms its objective validity.⁴

These universal truths, these essential principles of the Christian faith, Whichcote held, are generally entertained by all men.⁵ In reply to Tuckney's charge that this position was tantamount to granting a toleration to the worst of heresies, Whichcote reiterated his conviction that "all truly good men among us, do substantially agree; in all things saving." Those matters about which we disagree are not, and cannot be said to be, clearly set out in the Bible. Even the most rigorous man would hardly maintain that what is required

¹ Campagnac, *Cambridge Platonists*, xvii.

² Whichcote, *Select sermons*, 2-3.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ *The Cambridge History of English Literature* (ed. by A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller) (N.Y., 1918-1930), VIII, 276-277.

⁵ Whichcote, *Select sermons*, 13.

of us for salvation has not been clearly prescribed. Whichcote declared that he was persuaded that "good men have light enough, and direction plain and full enough, from Scripture" to apprehend those truths which God requires of them.¹ And, once more, he insisted that those principles and beliefs in religion which are necessary and immutable are agreed upon by all good men.²

Reasonable certainty of truth and moral conduct, then, rather than propriety of doctrinal views, give us the assurance of salvation. No criteria beyond the individual judgment can ever be imposed in religion. In those things that are manifest and hence necessary, men are in essential agreement, but in the darker recesses of truth men will disagree until they have by patient effort examined the face of knowledge with a clearer light. It is as childish as it is dangerous to destroy Christian unity by arrogant insistence upon truths that are not manifest. The orthodox are inflamed by fear of heresy and error, thereby displaying a grave misunderstanding of the nature of both faith and truth. Man progresses by a slow process of trial and error. His errors in belief must be attributed to those accidents of birth, education, and temperament which reason will in good season correct.³ The imperious have by their brutal insistence upon a dead uniformity belied the fact that the

¹ Whichcote, *Eight letters*, 11-12.

² Whichcote, *Several discourses*, III, 419-420. This point of view was vigorously preached by an earlier Cambridge Moderate, George Rust. (Rust, a native of Cambridge, was graduated from that university in 1647. He became a fellow of Christ's College in 1649 and during the revolutionary period was closely associated with the Platonists. He accompanied Jeremy Taylor to Ireland in 1661, for some years serving as dean of Connor. He was designated Bishop of Bromore in 1667.) In a sermon at St. Mary's Rust pointed out that every group arrogates the title of orthodox to itself. Truth, he held, is a very relative matter which men dispute about so angrily largely because their principles are self-evident to none but themselves. "Should we go abroad in the world, and ask as many as we meet, what is truth?, we should find it a changeable and uncertain notion, which every one cloath's his own apprehensions with. Truth is in every sect and party, though they speak . . . contradictions to one another. Truth is in the Turkish Alcoran, the Jewish Talmud, the Papist's Councils, the Protestant's Catechisms . . . each of these in their proper place and region. Truth is a . . . uncertain thing, and changes with the air and climate." (Quoted in *Cambridge History of English Literature*, VIII, 291.)

³ Whichcote, *Several discourses*, III, 422, *et passim*.

gospel spirit makes men meek, compassionate, and tolerant. It is this spirit of intolerance alone which prevents the world from accepting the evident truth of Christ to which natural reason persuades mankind.¹ For the gospel-way imposes upon man a calm, sedate spirit which deals temperately with others and which checks with rigorous reins the flaming spirit of pride and arrogance.

Whichcote brought a convincing and carefully reasoned indictment against religious persecution, which, as we have previously observed, was in his considered judgment destructive to the very essence of religion. Yet, so great was his detachment and so engrained his spirit of moderation that he failed to deal specifically with the vital problems that so exercised the England of his generation. We know from all the circumstances of his life that this almost incredible objectivity was not derived from intellectual cowardice; it sprang rather from his firm conviction that nothing could be gained by adding still more recrimination as fuel for the rage of fratricidal war already burning desperately in England. Indeed, it may be that the calm and almost Olympian strictures which he laid against religious coercion were more effective in persuading England of the iniquity of persecution than were the shrill cries of sectarian pleading. Whichcote added one more voice, and it was a powerful and respected voice, to the swelling chorus that demanded religious liberty in England.

Religious coercion, Whichcote taught, arises from a haughty and irreligious spirit. The persecutors stand condemned as men who seek "to assign a mode of divine worship" without authority from God or reason.² They endeavour by their harsh restraints to limit the charity of God. They invade the conscience and destroy man's richest birthright—the capacity of reason. Such coercion, needless to say, is the gravest injury and offence that a human being can commit against the majesty of God and the dignity of man. "For whosoever hath received any thing from God by mental illumination, if he doth not pursue it, to the refinement of his spirit; he doth counterwork God. He who stifles, or goes against his knowledge, doth in

¹ Whichcote, *Eight letters*, 20–23.

² Whichcote, *Select sermons*, 80.

effect give a check to God's working in him."¹ Those who seek to restrain the reason and conscience of others employ the Hebraic cudgels of fear rather than the persuasive instruments of Christianity.² Every man lies under an obligation to exercise his reason freely and patiently in the pursuit of truth, without fear of external pressure. No man can gain truth in an atmosphere of confusion and coercion. The Christian and the seeker require rather the opportunity to withdraw from the bustle of life and possess the inalienable right to decide without molestation upon the momentous problems of religion.³ It is therefore eminently desirable "that we would be no where peremptory . . . that we would not be dogmatical and self-assuming; that we would not judge and censure one another; that all our passions would display themselves in tenderness and compassion."⁴

The human race must insist upon the prerogative of reason which is its birthright, must maintain the intellectual dignity that differentiates it from the beasts. For too long the barbarous whip of persecution and intellectual coercion has deprived it of its just freedom. We must stand quietly but resolutely upon the determination of our own reason. "We must neither desert nor betray truth, to expedite ourselves out of difficulties, or to open a way to escape. Man must walk in his integrity through the world, and must maintain his truth" as the only beacon which can guide his soul.⁵ No man who is swayed from his own convictions will ever find repose of spirit or strength of faith. We will recognize that our determination of truth has no meaning for other men, but we will insist with quiet resolution upon the subjective sovereignty of our own judgment. "Our fallibility and the shortness of our knowledge should make us peaceable and gentle: because I may be mistaken, I must not be dogmatical and confident, peremptory and imperious. I will not break the certain laws of charity, for a doubtful doctrine or uncertain truth."⁶ The world can never gain peace, the Church can never flourish,

¹ Whichcote, *Select sermons*, 87.

² Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §1097.

³ Whichcote, *Select sermons*, 90-91. ⁴ Whichcote, *Several discourses*, I, 24.

⁵ Whichcote, *Select sermons*, 91.

⁶ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §130.

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

and the human race can never attain its true dignity until a spirit of moderation and tolerance prevails.

Many sinful forces have obstructed the triumph of reason and the sway of charity in the hearts of men. Some of these are subjective, but surely the most powerful and destructive have been the hardened greed and the intolerant pretensions of institutional religion. Thus, though the Roman Catholics hold to the foundations of faith,¹ they stand condemned because they deny the possibility of salvation to all outside their communion and because they teach that faith may be propagated by force.² They pretend to an infallibility of judgment which has not been bestowed upon the pope or any other man.³ Their fury has been chiefly directed against the Protestants because they have denied as the basis of their revolt the infallible authority to which Rome pretends and because they have posited faith upon the individual reason.⁴ But Protestantism did not for long maintain the purity of its own conception; in it, too, the fatal strains of persecution, arrogance, and infallibility speedily became apparent. Faction and unholy zeal have reached a kind of *crescendo*, proving again that "the more false any one is in his religion, the more fierce and furious . . . the more mistaken, the more imposing."⁵ The longest sword and the strongest lungs have become the measure of faith,⁶ with the result that Christianity has been swept again with the delusion that men may be taught by clubs.⁷

This is the parlous state into which arrogant and intolerant fanatics have brought the Christian Church. They have violated the human soul by compelling it to accept obligations of conscience to which it has not been persuaded by reason.⁸ They have by the spoliation of reason caused men to be deserted by their God and to sink below the level of their species.⁹ They have wrenched the sense of the scriptures and have fanned the warm coals of Christianity into a raging and destructive fire. Whichcote frankly confessed that he would prefer the mild and gentle philosophy of the Greeks to such

¹ Whichcote, *Several discourses*, III, 94.

² *Ibid.*, I, 253.

³ *Ibid.*, III, 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 253.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 256; *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §499.

⁶ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §500.

⁷ *Ibid.*, §353.

⁸ *Ibid.*, §238.

⁹ *Ibid.*, §1006.

a violent religion. For those earlier men were guided by reason, and reason must ever be the measure of any religion. When reason is prostituted the very possibility of religion is instantly destroyed. Christianity cannot be forced; it can root itself only in the warm and fertile soil of persuasion. If the Spirit of God "doth not satisfie, and persuade the mind of man" to receive the truth, "then there is no possibility of making this man to become a Christian."¹ This is the lesson of tolerance that must be burned deep into the consciousness of mankind before the title of religious can become more than an empty mockery. In tolerance, and in tolerance alone, lies the hope of the human race.

Whichcote was a completely tolerant man in his conduct as well as in his philosophy. He was, in the words of Bishop Burnet, a man of rare and moderate temper. He had "great credit with some that had been eminent in the late times, but made all the use he could of it to protect good men of all persuasions. He was much for liberty of conscience: and being disgusted with the dry systematical way . . . studied to raise those that conversed with him to a nobler set of thoughts."² Humanity, Whichcote was persuaded, seeks the good life as its end. If, therefore, any man exhibits a Christian temper and conducts himself with moral goodness he is not to be rejected. Some of these will be men whose faith is true, some whose faith is faulty, and others will not even profess the name of Christ. But all are bound by common observance, if not profession, of those principles of conduct which are fundamental to Christianity. The Church, broadly speaking, consists of those men who profess the essential minima of Christian faith. Creeds, forms, and government, about which men have raised a holocaust of war, are externals devoid of the slightest universal significance. Goodness, which, since we cannot penetrate the mystery of the human mind, is the evidence of faith, is far more important than a sterile propriety of creed. In this Latitudinarian philosophy there is contained a powerful and effective corrosive of dogma and of institutional strength; it was this conviction, now widely entertained,

¹ Whichcote, *Several discourses*, I, 270.

² Burnet, Gilbert, *History of my own time*, I, 331.

that was dissolving the very structure of Protestant orthodoxy. Religious toleration and institutional ruin were to be the inevitable consequences of its rapid spread during the second half of the seventeenth century.

Whichcote, it may be believed, saw with clearer perception than did most men the defeat and decay that awaited the rigid orthodoxies of his era. But this he was quite prepared to risk in order to gain for mankind the priceless benefit of religious toleration, which he held to be a necessary vindication of human dignity and reasonable faith. The government and the Gospel of Christ are mild and charitable. The Christianity of orthodoxy seems rather to be inflamed with the zeal of the devil than with the charitable spirit of Christ. For "zeal for God, is a warmth in the subject, that is not fiery in respect of the object." True faith warms the heart and reason "but it is not fiery and furious towards another that is of another apprehension." The reflective man will realize that when he believes a thing by reason, he cannot believe otherwise without the destruction of his nature. This prerogative must be extended to all other men as well—"by the self-same rule, may another believe as he sees cause."¹ The Christian will not dare to "blaspheme free and noble spirits in religion, who search after truth," lest in so doing he sink to the bestiality of persecution.² He will be persuaded that those who differ from him in faith may be as devoted to the pursuit of truth and as honest as he. He will be moved by piety as well as reason to "leave them to runne their hazard, of being right or wrong."³

Every man, it should be clear, must be granted absolute liberty to form his own judgment and to abide freely in that decision. No pressure other than reasonable persuasion may be brought to bear upon the resolved conscience. We must be charitable, we must be tolerant, we must "repeat again and again; if truth be not admitted one day, it may be another."⁴ We will then discover that when we believe with certainty of reason we will have attained the cool tolerance that flows from

¹ Whichcote, *Several discourses*, III, 51.

² Whichcote, *Eight letters*, 115-116.

³ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴ Whichcote, *Several discourses*, III, 52.

certainly of truth. We will have learned that since men are reasonable, none but reasonable methods will succeed for their conversion and persuasion.¹ We will accordingly shun the intemperate zeal and persecution which betray the fact that we seek to force upon other men principles for which we have no reasonable support.

This is a solid and persuasive argument for religious toleration. But Whichcote's logic embraced larger and more radical grounds as well. Error and diversity, he was deeply convinced, are of no consequence so long as men abide by the essentials of religion² which, as we have seen, he defined so broadly as to include all good and sober men whether Christian or not. God has not yet seen fit to give us knowledge in those matters about which good men differ.³ Since these men will all be saved and since there will be no discord amongst them in heaven, it is reasonable that there should be no persecution or discord amongst them on earth because of their differences. For it is the peculiar property of religion "to calm and quiet, to content and satisfie, to make gentle, and to compose the rolling tumbling mind of man."⁴ Religion certainly is not served by exasperating, but rather by composing the minds of men.⁵ Our duty will have been done when by the example of a good life and the persuasion of reason we endeavour to raise men to our knowledge of divine truth.⁶

For too long the Church has been deluded by the devilish phantom of a formal uniformity attained by compulsive weapons. It has confused uniformity of profession with unity of spirit. Obviously, it is futile to hope for agreement upon matters which cannot be precisely determined. The uniformity towards which we should aim will be none other than a common search for truth. Every field of knowledge must be explored—the pagan philosophers, the teachings of natural reason, and the divine revelation of the Bible. "Everie Christian must think and believe as he finds cause. Shall he speak in religion otherwise than he thinks? Truth is truth, whoever hath spoken itt or howsoever itt hath bin abused." So long as

¹ Whichcote, *Several discourses*, III, 54.

² *Ibid.*, III, 426-427.

³ *Ibid.*, III, 438.

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 440.

⁵ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §359.

⁶ *Ibid.*, §426.

we do not violate the bounds of charity the differences which separate Christian men are inconsequential.¹ It may well be, indeed, that our diversity forms in the divine plan the complete unity of truth, which our minds, fastened on our broken particles of knowledge, cannot comprehend. In diversity there is very great virtue. "All artists differ in their notions," Whichcote eloquently pleaded; "there are different opinions in several points of philosophy; the several constellations in the heavens have different influence; what is one man's meat, is another's medicine, and another's poison. We differ in age, in stature, in feature, in gait, in complexion . . . these varieties and differences, as well as harmonies and proportions, explicate the infinite wisdom of the Creator. Yet all, agreeing in human nature, are fit companions one for another, can take delight in each other's company."² Similarly it must be true that those men who agree in the essentials of faith, who seek to find and to live the good life, are united in essential unity in the sight of God. Before such a persuasion, persecution becomes a brutish nightmare.

The fundamental frame of the Christian life is as simple as it is generally entertained. It can be no more than living humbly before God and righteously towards our neighbour, with the hope of pardon from God for our short-comings. There are generally acknowledged principles of faith which persecution has never needed to advance; it has rather been concerned with the hideous task of enforcing the selfishly zealous ends of faction.³ The Christian Church requires no more than that men follow the dictates of untrammelled reason,⁴ resting certain in the knowledge that they will eventually find God. We may assume, Whichcote boldly proclaimed, that no man who is true to the dictates of his own reason can err dangerously. We may be sure that God accepts alike the faith that "results from the dark mists of the ignorant, and from the clearest intelligence of the learned."⁵ It may well be doubted whether any good man in any age has ever missed the

¹ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §569.

² Whichcote, *Several discourses*, III, 441-442.

³ *Ibid.*, III, 252.

⁴ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §75.

⁵ Whichcote, *Several discourses*, III, 443.

fundamentals of faith necessary to his salvation.¹ Error and heresy are phantom names conjured up by men who seek the destruction of the Church and the perversion of Christianity. Error is completely harmless because it possesses no weapons effective for the overthrow of faith.² Heresy has been construed simply as failure to agree with the prescriptions of wilful spirits who have arrogantly assumed that all men should see eye to eye with them. But men come "leisurely to knowledge." Their progress towards truth must of necessity, as they are men, be halting and obscured.³

It should be evident, Whichcote submitted, that liberty of conscience is a necessary condition of Christianity. Every man should subject himself to the sternest personal discipline. But towards all other men he should be completely tolerant, seeking to move them by no other means than reason and persuasion. In so far as we are Christian, in so far as the foundations of our own faith are sound, we will inevitably reflect the moderation of spirit that is a concomitant of true religion.⁴ The only "throne of judgment" which we will erect will be in our own mind for the trial of our own faith. That faith will be determined by cool examination, by free trial, and by considered judgment. If, after all this, we are at last mistaken, our error is pardonable.⁵ But it is inconceivable that we should err mortally so long as liberty of conscience prevails. For it must be insisted again that the saving essentials of faith have been so clearly revealed that no honest searcher can miss the way. It is only required for the attainment of Christ's Kingdom that "our zeale . . . may bee so kindled with pure fire from God's altar; that itt may rather warm, than burn; enliven rather than enflame."⁶ We may well leave to God the task of advancing His truth, while we dedicate ourselves to the maintenance of charity. Historically, it has been the tragedy of the Church that it has employed its resources for the creation of a pretended faith rather than for the maintenance of universal charity.⁷ Violence and the

¹ Whichcote, *Eight letters*, 51.

³ Whichcote, *Several discourses*, III, 445.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 242.

⁷ Whichcote, *Moral and religious aphorisms*, §68, §1097.

² *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 261.

⁶ Whichcote, *Eight letters*, 118.

repression of thought have formed the characteristic pattern of Christian history. "The cunning devill" has laid a snare for Christian men "in the notion of orthodoxie."¹ We must abandon our devotion to the monstrous ideal of a formal uniformity which paralyses the reason and freezes the marrow of charity. We must destroy the structure of persecution by admitting the obvious truth that men will not deliberately set their face against God by embracing error. We must insist as men and as Christians upon the complete liberty of judgment and conscience that must be ours if we are to attain the full stature and nobility of manhood.

Whichcote lent an impressive and bold defence to the theory of religious liberty. Unfortunately, he never addressed himself systematically to the exposition of his position and there is little evidence that the influence of his remarkably liberal thought extended during his lifetime much beyond the academic confines of Cambridge. Religious toleration was so implicitly part of his intellectual and moral position that, though it saturates all of his writing, he never felt it necessary to give careful and complete analysis to the principles which were in his age dividing England. But when his writings as a whole are surveyed, a well-balanced and almost unanswerable theory of religious liberty is revealed—revolutionary for the century in which he was nurtured, advanced even in our own age. Reposing complete trust in the innate goodness of mankind, displaying absolute confidence in the human reason, warmly devoted to a generous and moderate conception of Christianity, Whichcote enlarged the bounds of religious and intellectual tolerance to include areas that have even now not been fully won.

3. THE LESSER PLATONISTS: JOHN SMITH, 1616-1652; NATHANIEL CULVERWEL, 1618-1651; RALPH CUDWORTH, 1617-1685; HENRY MORE, 1614-1687

The thought of the other leading Cambridge Moderates may best be considered as an entity. These men wrote and conversed in an atmosphere of unusual intimacy and their thought forms, at least for the subject under survey, a solid

¹ Whichcote, *Eight letters*, 119.

unity. In the large it would seem that their contribution to the development of the theory of religious toleration was less considerable than that of Whichcote, who exercised a profoundly important influence upon all of them. It should further be borne in mind that Cudworth's principal writings were published well after the Restoration and that More's thought in the later years of his life underwent a material and, one is persuaded, a deteriorating change. It seems desirable to confine our attention principally to the works of the Platonists published prior to the time of the Restoration or concerned with the religious problems raised during the revolutionary period.

Following Whichcote's magnificent vindication of reason, the younger Platonists gave careful attention to the relation existing between the spheres of reason and faith and strongly championed the absolute liberty which the human mind should have in religious questions. Nathaniel Culverwel,¹ in his brilliant and learned *Discourse of the light of nature*, gave to reason a defence reminiscent of the vindication offered to it by Whichcote. He informs us in the *Preface* of the work that it was his purpose to give "to reason the things that are reason's, and unto faith the things that are faith's." There is in reality no strife between them, although many sinful and intolerant men fear to subject the institutional pretensions of churches to the light of reason. These men would stifle the breath of faith and would paralyse the only means by which humanity may attain a knowledge of truth.²

¹ The facts concerning Culverwel's parentage are not yet fully established. Dr. Powicke (*Cambridge Platonists*, 130) is inclined to follow Venn, who found proof that he was the son of Richard Culverwel, a London clergyman. Culverwel, who was born in 1618, entered Emmanuel College, Cambridge, as a pensioner in 1633 and was graduated B.A. in 1636. He was elected a fellow of his college in 1642. Culverwel never renounced the Calvinism in which he had been reared, but few writers of his generation denounced in stronger terms the rigidity and intolerance which characterized English Presbyterianism. Eight of his sermons were published in 1651 under the title of *Spiritual opticks*, while his complete works, under the title *An elegant and learned discourse of the light of nature, etc.*, appeared in 1652, a year after his untimely death. Culverwel wrote with facility and his works are marked by a breadth of charity, a warmth of feeling, and a lucidity of style reminiscent of Viscount Falkland.

² Culverwel, *Discourse of the light of nature*, 3.

It is true that reason is not all-sufficient, that it cannot completely fathom the depths of God's truth, but it does stand as the "door-keeper in the house of its God."¹ It is true also that some men have prostituted reason in order to advance their own selfish ends, but this constitutes no justification for denying all men their birthright. For it is upon reason that mankind must depend in order to distinguish between the error which may ensnare them and the truth which will save them. God has implanted in the minds of all men eternal laws of nature which are "not really distinguished from God Himself."² These laws are an intrinsic part of the substance of every man's being; fulness of perception and sharpness of understanding of them vary with the capacity of the individual, but we may be sure that the simplest man, as he is man, has been granted a sufficient perception of these eternal verities. "For nature has stamp't all . . . with the same seal, some softer beings took the impression very kindly and clearly; some harder ones took it more obscurely."³ The gift of reason, John Smith held, was by admission God's choicest blessing to mankind wherewith its "nature might be brought into conformity with Him."⁴ Natural reason impels all men

¹ Culverwel, *Discourse of the light of nature*, 5. ² *Ibid.*, 29. ³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴ John Smith was born of humble parentage in Northamptonshire in 1616. His family was probably Puritan in sympathy, and generous friends of that persuasion assisted him in gaining his education at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, which he entered in 1636. Whichcote was his tutor there and Smith was clearly influenced by the great Moderate. Smith was appointed a fellow of Queen's College seven years after he proceeded B.A. in 1640, and in 1650 was elected dean of that college. His only surviving writings are the ten sermons, delivered during his tenure as dean, which were edited by Worthington in 1660 from the chaotic manuscript left by Smith. He died when only thirty-six years of age. Patrick's famous funeral sermon not only provides us with most of our information concerning him but indicates the warm esteem in which he was held by those who knew him. Smith, Patrick said, was a man of immense intellectual strength who grasped completely every problem to which he set himself. He was "a living library . . . and a walking study, that carried his learning about with him." But he was not "a library lock'd up, nor a book clasped, but stood open for any to converse withall that had a mind to learn." (Smith, John, *Select discourses, etc.* [L., 1660, 1673], 493.) His tolerance was great, his charity broad, and he was free from the "spirit of devouring zeal" so typical of his age. Possessed of a temper "naturally hot and cholerick," he was yet master of himself and was dedicated to the healing of passion and the promotion of moderation. (*Ibid.*, 503.)

to seek to bring themselves into conformity with the will of God because thereby they fulfil their own nature. "This royal law of nature," Culverwel added, "was never confin'd or limited to any outward surface; but it was bravely situated in the centre of a rational being, alwayes keeping the soul company, guarding it, and guiding it."¹ Man is therefore instinct with a reason which unites him with the Divine, and all human beings, whether Christian or pagan, "clasp and twine" naturally around the staff of God's laws and truth.²

Religion, Culverwel maintained, rests upon firm and immutable principles which all men may discover with the assistance of reason. "Reason is the pen by which nature writes this law of her own composing; this law 'tis publisht by authority from heaven, and reason is the printer."³ Reason alone will serve man in discovering these principles embedded deep in his own nature, despite the efforts of intolerant spirits to compel mankind to accept fallible glosses of their own contrivance.⁴ These essential principles are self-apparent and are clearly acknowledged by all men; no more can be required without challenging the charity of God. It is true that God may on occasion reveal Himself by special means to individual men, but such revelation is extremely rare and has none but subjective validity.⁵ Certainly any attempt to impose it upon other men is an insult to reason and an impious persecution. Man must not sacrifice the cool voice of reason to the hot and zealous pretensions of revelation. For it is our reason that binds us most closely with God and "the more men exercise reason, the more they resemble God himself, who has but few creatures that can represent him in so bright an excellency."⁶ Though the human reason is weak and limited, it suffices for the requirements of every man: "the letters of natures law, are so fairly printed, they are so visible and capital, as that you may read them by this candle-light."⁷

Man can be saved in no other way than by his own resources of reason and by his patient search for truth. He is false to

¹ Culverwel, *Discourse of the light of nature*, 44.

² *Ibid.*, 50.

³ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 141-142.

himself and traitorous to God when he permits his calm judgment to be overborne by the weight of tradition or by the persecuting rigours of institutional zeal.¹ In reason resides the hope of the Church, the rich promise of tolerance, and the possibility of attaining the Kingdom of God. When men come at last to live and worship according to its dictates, peace and concord will reign throughout the world. Schism, discord, and even heresy will no longer plague the Church. "If the soft and sober voice of reason were more attended to, reason would make some differences kisse and be friends, 'twould sheath up many a sword, 'twould quench many a flame, 'twould binde up many a wound."² For the reasonable man will not pry into the mysteries of faith nor will he contend when he cannot explain. Reason sustains the structure of faith and is its necessary concomitant. Between them there can be no conflict since both are derived from God and since both are in themselves good. From these solid roots man grows to the full stature of his nature; by them he will at last see God.

Unhappily, however, men have not been permitted to employ the reason with which they have been blessed. Religion has been hardened in the creeds, has been canalized into deep canyons of rigid belief into which the light of reason never penetrates. Imperious spirits have sought to fasten the reason and conscience of men and women upon the cross of persecution. The very nature of faith has been violated; the world has been laid waste in the interests of doctrines which no man understands and which are not in any case necessary to salvation. Yet "God respects not a bold, confident, and audacious faith, that is big with nothing but its own presumptions."³ These men of proud and literal faith know nothing of the nature of religion and hence are quickest to impose their carnal prescriptions upon others. This "vulgar sort think that they know Christ enough, out of their creeds and catechismes, and confessions of faith: and if they have but a little acquainted themselves with these; and like parrets conned the words of

¹ Culverwel, *Discourse of the light of nature*, 155-159.

² *Ibid.*, 166.

³ Smith, John, *Discourse of legal and evangelical righteousness*, in *Select Discourses*, 320.

them, they doubt not but that they are sufficiently instructed in all the mysteries of the Kingdome of Heaven.”¹ These are the men who persecute; these are the spirits who seek to confine the free truth of God to the dark cells framed by their own feverish imagination.

We must come to know in our hearts as well as to say with our lips that the religion of Christ is intensely spiritual and completely individualistic. Men cannot be saved in units larger than the individual. The gospel is not a prescribed formula to which we lend a stupid obedience, but a quickening spirit within us which can never have meaning unless “the soul it self be kindled from within, and awakened into” life.² The relation of the religious man to his God is so intimate that it should be evident that no coercive or external force may intrude into or order that bond of union. Hence, though the Christian will subject himself to the strictest discipline, he will abide in charity and peace with other men. He will instinctively realize that Christ has no concern with the wrangling about intricacies of faith or the bitter feuds concerning the precise definition of His Church. “He is the best

¹ Cudworth, Ralph, *A sermon preached before the . . . House of Commons*, etc. (Cambridge, 1647), 3. Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688) was born at Aller in Somersetshire in 1617. He entered Emmanuel College in 1632, and seven years later was elected a fellow of the College. He was made master of Clare Hall in 1645, accepting in the same year an appointment as Regius Professor of Hebrew. It was during this period of his career that he wrote to Limborch that his earlier Puritanism had been mellowed by association with the Cambridge Platonists. He had become persuaded that the Calvinistic obsession with predestination was inimical to faith and morals. In 1654 Cudworth was appointed master of Christ’s College, where he continued until his death more than three decades later. During our period Cudworth published nothing save two very significant sermons, though he maintained a deserved reputation for learning and philosophical profundity amongst his friends and colleagues. His great work, the *True intellectual system of the universe*, appeared in 1678. This remarkable discourse, which was intended as a rebuttal to the religious portions of the *Leviathan*, was designed as an introductory treatise to a systematic theory of knowledge. But the sensitive and somewhat indolent scholar drew back when it was apparent that the work had been received with indifference by the philosophers and bitter opposition from the materialists. The great philosophical plan was never completed. A learned scholar, a sensitive human being, and a man of deep personal piety, Cudworth was not at home in the cold and biting air of Restoration thought.

² Cudworth, *Sermon preached before the . . . House of Commons*, 5–6.

Christian, whose heart beats with the truest pulse towards heaven; not he whose head spinneth out the finest cobwebs.”¹ No man will ever be excluded from heaven for failure to understand those mysteries of faith which lie beyond his comprehension. For true religion consists in walking humbly before God and in seeking goodness and holiness in our own life.² It has nothing to do with churches, it does not demand a dead uniformity of profession, it requires nothing more than peace, freedom, and tolerance for the pursuit of truth and the perfection of those potentialities which God has bestowed upon us.

When the claims of religious liberty are set forth, the orthodox invariably rejoin with the contention that in a state in which tolerance prevails heresy and schism will dissipate Christian unity. This contention ignores the fact that the uniformity of which they speak has never existed and it confuses Christian unity with a formal uniformity. We must be scrupulous in religion not to devote ourselves too earnestly to our private opinions and not to advance too zealously the pretensions of any sect. Nor should we condemn the creeds and opinions of other men without a full understanding of them. “They are not alwaies the best men that blot most paper; Truth is not . . . so voluminous, nor swells it into such a mighty bulk as our books doe.”³ That which the Lord requires of us is clearly revealed, is simple, and is generally entertained. Though we are uncertain about many of God’s mysteries, we agree upon the saving essentials of His truth. These principles are derived from reason and their validity is acknowledged by all mankind. So long as we build solidly upon them the persecution, confusion, and bloodshed which have marred the history of the Church cannot possibly haunt the world. For too long those who fanatically believe that “their church is the true church” have imposed questionable things upon the Christian conscience.⁴ The Church has been torn with feuds and warfare concerning doctrines which cannot be certainly known and

¹ Cudworth, *Sermon preached before the . . . House of Commons*, 14.

² *Ibid.*, 19.

³ Smith, *Select Discourses*, 12.

⁴ Culverwel, Nathaniel, *The white stone, etc.* (L., 1652), in *Discourse of the light of true nature*, 161.

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which are not in fact necessary for our faith. Significantly, the Cambridge Moderates included amongst these questions which the human reason cannot resolve and which are therefore not essential to our belief, doctrines like the trinity which had long been posed as the ultimate test of propriety of belief. Thus Henry More¹ held that there was deep obscurity on this doctrine, an obscurity which the sharpest and most pious minds had been unable to penetrate. The New Testament sets it forth but in such wise that it is not clearly revealed to mankind. Hence men who dogmatically propound it or impose it set themselves above the New Testament.² Since Christianity is a reasonable faith that depends exclusively upon reasonable persuasion for its propagation, only that which is perfectly intelligible can be employed for its purposes.³ No man can justly be compelled to accept that which is not evidently clear to him, and when we force the unconvinced mind we drive it to hypocrisy and atheism by an act of persecution.⁴ The Church must confine its doctrines to those

¹ Henry More (1614-1687) was the son of a Lincolnshire gentleman who, though a Calvinist, remained devoted to the king during the period of the Civil Wars. More was educated at Eton and at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he was graduated B.A. in 1635. Shortly before the outbreak of the War he was appointed a fellow of his college, where he was to live quietly and comfortably during his lifetime, declining repeated offers of high academic and ecclesiastical preferment. A humanist in his tastes and learning, prolific and catholic in his writings, calm and thoughtful in his judgment, More was to exercise a wider contemporary influence than his Cambridge colleagues. During the Civil War he made no secret of his personal preference for a chastened episcopal Church of England, but this was a matter of but slight consequence to him. In the period under consideration More was devoted to philosophical pursuits and was perhaps the most advanced of his circle in his rationalism. In his later life, especially after the appearance of the *Enchiridion Metaphysicum*, the mystical and somewhat confused temper characteristic of his later works reflected a profound change in the thought of the man. More was, in the words of Bishop Burnet, an open-hearted and sincere Christian philosopher who sought to vindicate Christianity against the assaults of the new materialism by grounding it firmly upon reason. A remarkably tolerant and moderate man, More's charity was unlimited save towards the fanatical sects, which he disliked because of their irrationality, their claims of private revelation, and their fanaticism. (*Philosophical writings* (ed. by F. I. Mackinnon) (N.Y., 1925), Intro., xvi.)

² More, Henry, *An explanation of the grand mystery of godliness* (L., 1660), in *Theological works, etc.* (L., 1708), 319.

³ *Ibid.*, 322-323.

⁴ Culverwel, *The white stone, in Discourse of the light of nature*, 161.

principles which are certainly known and which are acceptable to every reason. And these principles are very few and very simple indeed.

The essentials of Christian faith are accepted by all men and all nations, whether they be Christian or pagan.¹ More would suggest, indeed, that Christianity is the sum, the essence, of all that is good in all religions. It completes and perfects Judaism and paganism; being the "substance of whatever was considerable in any religion being comprehended in the Gospel of Christ."² Hence it will be immediately and rationally acceptable to all men once it has been stripped of the non-essentials with which a persecuting church has encrusted it. Surely that is "pure gold that has been examin'd by so many several touch-stones, and has had approbation from them all."³ All men are united by nature and by reason in this faith, requiring only persuasion and the example of a good life to win them to Christ. They remain lost to Him simply because a rigid and persecuting church has robbed them of their birthright.

Having established the reasonable character of true faith by careful argument, having demonstrated the spiritual nature of religion, and having indicated that the essential principles of Christianity are few and generally entertained, the Cambridge Moderates had laid the basis for one of the most impressive discussions of the iniquity of all compulsion in religious matters that the seventeenth century was to produce. The persecuting spirit, they maintained, arises from these related sources: an arrogant temper of mind, an intolerant and fanatical enthusiasm, and an impious conviction of infallible knowledge. These psychological attributes of intolerance were carefully analysed as the principal cause of all compulsion and outright persecution.

John Smith complained that men have long sought because of intellectual arrogance to raise their own glosses upon God's truth to a position of eminence and exclusive acceptance.

¹ Culverwel, *Discourse of the light of nature*, 78-79.

² More, *Explanation of the . . . mystery of godliness*, in *Theological works*, 68.

Culverwel, *Discourse of the light of nature*, 80.

'We have,' he wrote, "many grave and reverend idolaters that worship truth onely in the image of their own wits; that could never adore it so much as they may seem to doe, were it anything else but such a form of belief as their own wandering speculations had at last met together in, were it not that they find their own image and superscription upon it."¹ It is strange indeed that men dare prescribe to God the form and nature of His truth. It is sad that it is merely fanatical opinion that makes "the thundring engine murd'rous balls out-sling, and send mens groning ghosts to lower shade of horrid hell."² These persecuting spirits have accomplished the ruin of religion by securing the exaltation of their own imperious wills. They are guilty of a harsh and intolerant spirit which would "prescribe laws to all things" and "judge all things at its own tribunal."³ These men are seized by a fanatical spirit which assails the throne of God Himself, which dares pose as the tribunal between good and evil.

We are all inclined to construct our own ideas in religion from non-rational sources, and then to cling to them obstinately whether they be true or false. Furthermore, since such a faith has no organic relation to Christianity, we are without the restraints of tolerance which prevent the Christian from seeking under any condition to impose his faith upon others. Men are all too prone "to believe themselves to have found out this onely pearl of price; the religion of most men being indeed nothing else but such a strain and scheme of thoughts and actions, as their natural propensions, sway'd by nothing else but an inbred belief of a Deity, accidentally run into."⁴ In consequence glosses, subtleties, and sheer fancies stalk through the world in the cloak of religion. True faith, on the other hand, reflects itself in a holy life and a "god like pattern of purity."⁵

¹ Smith, *Select discourses*, 8, et cf. 118-119.

² More, Henry, *The complete poems, etc.* (ed. by A. B. Grosart) ([Edinburgh], 1878), 63.

³ Smith, John, *Excellency and nobleness of true religion*, in *Select discourses*, 388.

⁴ Smith, John, *Shortness and variety of a Pharisaick righteousness*, in *Select discourses*, 342.

⁵ Smith, John, *True way or method of attaining to divine knowledge*, in *Select discourses*, 9.

The spiritual arrogance which the Platonists had so vigorously condemned expresses itself in institutional form in the dangerous and impious claim of rigid churches to an infallible knowledge and exclusive spiritual authority. Such churches invade the innermost sanctuary of that sovereignty which God has retained for Himself and "abhor true goodness as being contrary to their corrupt natures."¹ They raise a pretended infallibility in questions and in areas where no human judgment possesses valid knowledge, much less authority. The Christian religion needs no infallible judge since all men possess in the scriptures a personal and sufficient rule of faith which will secure their salvation.² God demands no more of us than that we follow the truth which we discover in the Bible to the best of our ability. In civil matters an infallible authority is necessary because the evil actions of men may injure their fellows; but in spiritual questions such an authority need not and cannot exist because the mere retention of opinions works no harm upon our fellow men. The churches that strive to exercise a sovereign sway over the consciences of other men are by the fact of persecution branded with the mark of antichrist. This was More's grave allegation against Catholicism, which in his view had been chiefly responsible for assuming an infallibility that did not exist and for the fiendish torture of those whom it denominated as heretical.³ This Church has undertaken an awful responsibility which it cannot vindicate in reason or scripture. Surely, it is obvious that the unbeliever can be won to Christ by no other means than persuasion. Certainly we must admit that such a man may well be "more solicitous of his own important concerns, and more faithful to his own eternal interest, than many thousand men put together; and . . . though he may not have so much learning and wit as these, yet he may conduct his own affairs more safely than if they were put into their hands; especially they that pretend to be guides to heaven for others."⁴

Quite as dangerous to Christian liberty and true religion, in

¹ More, Henry, *A modest enquiry into the mystery of iniquity, etc.* (L., 1660), in *Theological works*, 450.

² *Ibid.*, 453.

³ *Ibid.*, 507-509.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 456.

fact closely related to those who arrogantly claim infallibility of knowledge, are those who offend charity and tolerance by their inordinate zeal. These men are so imbued with the delusion of their own perfection that they forget that truth is able to support itself and that it requires no weapons save those spiritual agencies with which the Bible endows it.¹ These men are so stubbornly devoted to their own convictions that none but the power of Almighty God can prevail against them.² It is the peculiar vice of intemperate zeal that it invades the conscience of other men with the peremptory demand that reason bend before delusion. Such zeal is the enemy not only of true piety and learning but of human society. Surely true and reasonable faith will not lead us to the vilification of all other religions, to "damning the very best and most conscientious Turks, Jews, and pagans to the pit of hell, and then to double lock the door upon them, or to stand there to watch with long poles to beat them down again, if any of them should offer to emerge and endeavour to crawl out."³ This has been the cruel wrong that persecuting zeal has inflicted upon the body of Christian charity.

The Cambridge Moderates had analysed boldly and skilfully the tawdry motives and the dangerous passions which underlie religious persecution. Theirs was a cold and an almost dispassionate anger that, ignoring the claims that rival orthodoxies were pressing in England, laid the axe of reason against the roots from which all intolerance springs. It is this fact that lends peculiar dignity and especial strength to their denunciation of coercion and persecution in religion.

Coercion, they repeatedly indicated, has no place in religion. The bondage of fear cannot unite men with God. Man is joined with Him by the ties of love and devotion and "there needs no law to compel a mind acted by the true spirit of divine love to serve God or to comply with his will."⁴ The Church has been endowed with spiritual agencies wholly competent to win men to Christ and it betrays its own perversion when it abandons these weapons to grasp the brutal arm of force. What avails it, Culverwel enquired, if "a body

¹ More, *Theological works*, 7.

² *Ibid.*, Intro., ix.

³ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁴ Smith, *Select discourses*, 357-358.

be pull'd and hal'd and scar'd into obedience? The soul is not conquer'd with all this. A slave do's but watch an opportunity for shaking off the yoke."¹ Christ has most specifically and clearly repudiated these harsh measures in the building of His Kingdom. Every man must be saved by that truth which he has been able to secure by the light of his own reason. Since our knowledge of divine truth is at best fallible and fragmentary:

"We cannot well enjoin
Nor this nor that, nor faith-forms freely coyn
And make the trembling conscience swear thereto,
For we our selves do but ghesse and divine,
What we force other men to swear is true."²

The Church has for too long wielded the hammer of the law that suffices only to break hearts, while neglecting the key of the gospel which will open the heart of mankind for the reception of saving faith.³ Every church in Christendom has been guilty of coercion and persecution. False doctrines and prejudices have been the cross upon which honest seekers have been crucified. The world has seen good wine and fatal poison poured from the same bottle, the false urged with quite as much vigour as the true.⁴ The deadly cancer of persecution has spread its tentacles through the Church, arresting spiritual growth, paralysing men in the pursuit of truth, and making a hollow mockery of the liberty which Christ has promised us.

No reasonable, much less religious, argument can be adduced to support persecution. The strongest conviction of right cannot excuse such fiendish methods. The zeal and pious mouthings of the persecutors mark an arrogant soul and an imperious will that can only be denounced as a travesty on religion. "It would prevent a great deal of bloud and bitterness in the Christian world," More wrote, "if we reserved the flower and strength of our zeal for the undoubted truth of God" and bore ourselves modestly and tolerantly in all

¹ Culverwel, *White stone*, in *Discourse of the light of nature*, 142.

² More, *Complete poems*, 28.

³ Culverwel, *White stone*, in *Discourse of the light of nature*, 143.

⁴ More, *Theological works*, 347.

spiritual matters that are not transcendently clear.¹ Since men can be convinced by no means other than reasonable persuasion, persecution must be regarded as a foul mockery upon the very nature of religion. Indeed, forcing men to a dead uniformity of faith is as if:

"The King of Aragon,
Who was well skilled in astronomy,
Should by decree deprive each country clown
Of life, of lands, or of sweet liberty
That would not fully avow each star in sky
Were bigger then the earth."²

All churches have to a greater or lesser degree been guilty of this impious presumption of persecution. Actually those churches "that persecute and kill . . . for conscientious differences in religion" are guilty of the awful sin of idolatry. They persecute with a barbarous and idolatrous zeal, turning "the living God of the Christians, who is love it self, into the foulest idols of the heathen . . . and plainly commit spiritual idolatry, violating and defacing the peculiar character of the God of the Christians, while they thus pretend to worship him."³ More's hatred of religious persecution was so intense that he doubted that the Roman Church, which, in his view, had been chiefly responsible for the prostitution of the spiritual character of the Church of Christ, was a true Church in which salvation might be gained.⁴ Persecution, he concluded, is the worst of all sins, the most bestial of all traits of the mind, and the most dangerous to human liberty and to civilized society.

Christendom stands in mortal danger, for it has permitted the insidious virus of persecution slowly to poison the very substance of institutional religion. Churches have set themselves up as infallible judges to condemn as heretics those who cannot accept their judgment in every particular. Men have become so fanatically attached to the tenets of their own eccentric belief that they have "a burning and fiery zeal

¹ More, Henry, *A Platonick song of the soul*, Preface to second (1647) ed., in *Complete poems*, 6.

² More, *Complete poems*, 29.

³ More, Henry, *An antidote against idolatry, etc.* (L., 1674), in *Theological works*, 823.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 796, but see *ibid.*, 487.

against the opinions and deportments of others that are not of their own sect.”¹ In consequence righteousness has been measured in terms of doctrinal propriety. We have forgotten that true religion is subjective, that spiritual goodness must find its seat in the soul and reason of man. The external trappings of worship have come to be mistaken for piety while the ends of religion have been neglected. The churches of Christendom tend to “look at a garish dress and attire of religion, or to be enamoured rather with some more specious and seemingly spiritual forms, than with the true spirit and power of godliness and religion itself.”² Thus has Christ been driven from His own Church, thus has the meaning and nature of His message been perverted by cruel and artful men who have sought not the enlargement of truth but their own aggrandizement.

The Cambridge Platonists held that liberty of conscience and freedom of worship were the necessary conditions to the restoration of the spiritual nature of religion. Every human being must be protected and encouraged in his pursuit of divine truth, and no ulterior force may be permitted to constrain the mind and conscience. In essence, the Cambridge Moderates maintained that religion was an intensely individualistic matter, that the human reason must find its way alone and unassisted, and that the Church can be regarded as nothing more than a loosely knit organization of those who hold in common the essentials of faith. Good conduct, a moderate temper, and an open and enquiring mind are the criteria by which the Christian must be judged in this world. This conception is distinguished by a remarkable liberality and breadth of view; it is difficult indeed to recall that it was advanced in a period when England was torn by the most bitter sectarian strife she has ever known. The point of view propounded by the Cambridge group was completely secular, and it will be observed that their argument, advanced so effectively in support of the principle of religious toleration, placed them in close alliance with the numerous lay parties united in the defence of spiritual freedom. The Cambridge Moderates sustained the cause of toleration with warmth, with

¹ Smith, *Select discourses*, 347.

² *Ibid.*, 351.

complete candour, and with a fine absence of sectarian interest.

Fundamentally, the Cambridge Platonists based their plea for religious liberty upon the inviolability of the human reason. Man's reason, Culverwel contended, enables him to direct his life with certainty and security.¹ No external force can constrain reason without destroying the most vital element of the spiritual nature. Tradition and authority have been vested in institutions with the inevitable consequence that weak and tractable men have been seduced into an irrational conformity to a faith which they do not comprehend. This fatal tendency has "blasted many buds of knowledge" and has "quencht many sparks and beams of light."² Reason has been imprisoned and the spirit has been enslaved. Even more tragically, limits have been set upon the extent of knowledge, and spiritual growth has been atrophied by the crushing weight of the dead hand of authority. In sacred matters which concern the eternal welfare of every human being, "Babylon hath heated her furnace seven times hotter, whilst under the pompous name of a Catholique Church, under the glittering pretences of antiquity and authority, they have as much as they could put out all the lamps of the Lord."³ Reason and faith cannot be thus fettered. Reason must be left free to search out both old and new truths. God requires of us a living, a rational, faith which, though it may fall into error, grows and matures in the beneficent light of reason. "An eye open is more acceptable to God than an eye shut." Men must rise up to destroy a tyranny which commands them to embrace that church which they regard as false, which seeks to choke out all the living elements of true faith.⁴ Men must, as they are men and Christians, insist upon the right to exercise the complete intellectual liberty with which God has invested them.

All men, More insisted, who profess the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, and who believe in the ultimate reward of the good and the punishment of the wicked, should be granted an unconditional liberty unless they maintain practices inconsistent with public morality.⁵ This absolute

¹ Culverwel, *Discourse of the light of nature*, 155.

² *Ibid.*, 157.

³ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 162-164.

⁵ More, *Theological works*, 361.

liberty, which was broad enough to include every seventeenth-century sect, belongs to men as an inviolable natural right and is secured to them as a principle of religion. "The way to heaven," Cudworth taught, "is plain and easy, if we have but honest hearts. . . . Christ came not to ensnare us and entangle us with captious niceties, or to puzzle our heads with deep speculations, and lead us through hard and craggy notions into the kingdom of heaven." No man will ever be barred from heaven for his want of knowledge or his errors so long as he has lived and searched with an humble and patient heart.¹ The orthodox will raise the cry of heresy, but in sober fact heresy has ever been a term of opprobrium with which men have condemned mere differences of judgment. It is a charge levelled by presumptuous sects that feel that they are "the only people concern'd in vision of the witnesses, and . . . expect wonderful things for themselves, which shall be accompanied with the destruction or suppressing of all others that are not of their sect."² Every man enjoys a natural right to hold firmly to all errors that are grounded in conscience until such time as he has been persuaded by reason to accept another opinion. To withhold religious liberty from such a man is "both a piece of inhumanity and injustice towards him, and a kind of rebellion against God."³ The denial of unlimited freedom can lead to nothing else than the inquisition and the blotting out of all liberty and truth. Those who have followed Christ have ever scorned and rejected the carnal weapons of the persecutors. They are persuaded that the truth which "must look the sun in the face forever" has nothing to fear from the candle of error; they are deeply convinced that the truth of God gains strength, solidity, and dignity when it is raised upon the sound pillars of critical reason.⁴ Men of true faith are content and happy to extend to every opinion freedom in which to try itself before the eyes of men. They hold that the Church of Christ "is like a woman big with child, who should therefore take a special care that she be not girded or

¹ Cudworth, Ralph, *Sermon preached before the . . . House of Commons*, 66-71.

² More, *Theological works*, 761.

³ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁴ Culverwel, *Discourse of the light of nature*, 165-166.

laced too tight, for fear of miserably miscarrying.”¹ These men of good faith are prepared to submit all opinions to the penetrating light of reason, and to live confidently and serenely in the knowledge that truth when freed by tolerance will in the end prevail.

The Christian man, therefore, is tolerant because he is deeply persuaded of the spiritual nature of religion and of the ultimate victory of truth in his own nature and in all mankind. But he is likewise charitable in his temper and mild in his opinions because he realizes that men will never attain fulness of knowledge, much less infallibility of judgment. Our understanding in divine matters is at best imperfect and uncertain.² We may be sure that all humanity have at least a glimmering of the truth of God, a perception sufficient unto their salvation. But the glass of truth is dark for many men and is dim and fractured indeed for the heathen peoples, who will be judged in terms of the partial knowledge which God has bestowed upon them.³ There is no hope whatsoever for these men of little faith and feeble knowledge if the tender plant of reason is uprooted by the cruel hook of persecution. For they too are sincere men and it is abundantly evident that the “sovereign power of God sets the sincere religionist free in matters of religion from any external force or power whatsoever.”⁴

No possible objection of policy, reason, or divinity can be raised against religious toleration. All sects see this clearly when they measure religion in terms of their own creed, but their narrow vision and peremptory spirit cause them to deny its benefits to other groups quite as pious and determined as they. Yet they should at least be restrained by the reflection that unless religious liberty does prevail every sect will be at the throat of every other. Confusion, bitterness, and warfare will ensue and their sect, their particular brand of truth, will be as likely to perish in this unholy debacle as any other. As men imbued with reason and a burning desire to find God, the sectaries can surely be persuaded that all men

¹ More, *Theological works*, 362.

² Culverwel, Nathaniel, *Spiritual opticks: or a glasse discovering the weakness and imperfection of a Christians knowledge of this life* (L., 1651), in *Discourse of the light of nature*, 178-179.

³ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴ More, *Theological works*, 363.

inherently possess a right "to examine what is the best way to serve God . . . and not to be tied up so to that religion [which] is first proposed to them."¹ Peace and true faith flourish only when men submit their judgment to the cool direction of reason. Infinite advantage will instantly prevail when the Christian world has at last accepted this basic truth. Disorder and the brutal passions incited by religious warfare will vanish. Each religion will be left free to expand and to test its gloss against truth, though never in a spirit of bitter rivalry. Then heathen nations, now horrified by the flames of intolerant wrath which consume Christendom, will have cause to submit their judgments to the richer truth of Christ. It will at last be recognized that "no man is to be persecuted for religion, if he have not forfeited that right by taking upon him the liberty of persecuting others or committing something else of a like nature."²

These will be very great gains for religion and for civilization. But it is probable, the moderates argued, that even more substantial benefits will result from religious toleration because the vast reservoirs of spiritual strength inherent in Christianity will at last be tapped. When spiritual weapons are employed for the attainment of spiritual ends, a divine love which "reconciles the jarring principles of the world, and makes them all chime together" will at last knit mankind into an harmonious whole. It will be discovered that "sweetnesse and ingenuity, will more powerfully command men's minds then passion, sowrenness, and severity; as the soft pillow sooner breaks the flint, then the hardest marble." Truth and love, the true and mighty weapons of Christ, will prevail against all error. "The golden beams of truth and the silken cords of love, twisted together, will draw men on with a sweet violence, whether they will or no," and will save the soul without destroying the body.³ Christianity has nothing to lose by disowning the carnal weapons of force. Surely all men of faith will agree that it is the most reasonable and evidently true of all religions.⁴ Under conditions of tolerance our know-

¹ More, *Theological Works*, 364 ff.

² *Ibid.*, 365.

³ Cudworth, *Sermon preached before the . . . House of Commons*, 62-63.

⁴ More, *Theological works*, 365.

ledge and our spiritual strength will be enormously expanded. All men can then contribute their mite towards the perfecting of the human soul. It will be discovered that the "dimme-sighted in philosophy" may "become eagle-eyed in divinity."¹ The gospel, in the words of Culverwel, will shine with its own radiance when the gross elements of coercion and arrogance have been consumed by the fires of moderation. Then, and not until then, will the Kingdom of God be at hand. For this kingdom consists of those who "use no other sword than that of the spirit against idolaters themselves, whom they never kill,"² but embrace in the infinite charity of Christian love.

Of all the Platonists, only More deigned to consider the problem of toleration in the light of traditional theory regarding the relations of church and state. The Cambridge group held that the case of religious liberty was obvious, reasonable, and prescriptive. It required no justification against a persecuting power which an unscrupulous and ambitious clergy had placed in the hands of the civil magistrate. More, however, dealt succinctly and impressively with the advantages which the civil society would gain from spiritual freedom.

The state, he held, should guarantee religious toleration to all men who do not practise teachings inimical to morality or civil order. The civil ruler fulfils his duty towards religion when he maintains for his subjects the precious prerogative of liberty.³ Every man must be granted freedom to change his faith at will, even from Christianity, if he be so persuaded. The magistrate will lend no material aid to any sect, though he will greatly stimulate every communion by requiring the clergy to gain their victories and confirm their judgments by spiritual means. The ruler will lay no punishment upon any man, Christian or pagan, for a religious offence or opinion. Civil discretion will probably cause him to favour those who are of his own faith in his public appointments, but he will none the less seek to lend his strength to those who stand

¹ Culverwel, Nathaniel, *The schisme* (L., 1652), in *Discourse of the light of nature*, 14.

² Palaeopolitanus, Franciscus (i.e. More, Henry), *Divine dialogues, containing sundry disquisitions and instructions concerning the attributes and providence of God, etc.* (L., 1668, 1713), 321.

³ More, *Theological works*, 366-373.

modestly and quietly upon the fundamentals of faith. He will encourage and reward all ministers in their efforts and will seek by every possible means to raise the level of public intelligence by education. For the reason, which is the bulwark of Christianity, is sharpened by careful training. When these things are done, when a generous and complete toleration prevails, the truth of God will be "like an unsheathed sword, bright and glittering, sharp and cutting, and irresistibly convincing the rational spirit of a man. Whereas now our religion is wrapt up in so many wreaths of hay and straw, that no man can see nor feel the edge of it."¹

This nobly phrased sentiment may be regarded as epitomizing the moderate position to which the Cambridge Platonists had contributed notable, if detached, support. England owes much to a calm and strong group of thinkers who remained unmoved before the erratic and tempestuous winds of civil war, who maintained intact the delicate ties that bind a culture with its own past, and who provided a nation tiring of internecine conflict with a broad and firm basis upon which an enduring peace could be restored. The moderates, though deeply religious in their personal lives, display clearly the deep fissures which disillusionment had wrought in the structure of faith. They were wholly persuaded that coercive authority in religion must be replaced by individual responsibility; that force must give way to reason; that the ideal of uniformity must yield before a religious toleration which would grant to all honest and peaceful men an unconditioned freedom. The moderates had been somewhat reluctantly driven by the chronic and desperate conflict between rival orthodoxies to the opinion that an institutional conception of religion could not longer be maintained in the modern world. Christian history during a full century confirmed their argument that the requirements of sovereignty, the future of civilization, and the survival of Christianity made necessary a system of religious toleration which repudiated the essential principles of medieval thought and denied the basic pretensions of the historical Protestant orthodoxies.

This radical and stoutly argued position found its philo-

¹ More, *Theological works*, 368.

sophical roots in the stream of Christian humanism which, though it had enjoyed a long and distinguished history in England, may be traced back through Arminius to Erasmus of Rotterdam. The moderates in England during the period of the Civil Wars had given it a brilliant elaboration which was to contribute very significantly to the mature development of the theory of religious toleration. Careless of doctrinal propriety, scornful of the shrill claims of the orthodox communions, suspicious of the honesty and soundness of the clerical mind, and insistent that reason and common sense must be applied to the quarrels which were dividing Christianity into irreconcilable factions and making a shambles of civilization, the moderates contributed a thoughtful, impressive, and unanswerable plea for religious freedom.

D. THE RATIONALISTS AND THE SCEPTICS: THE HARDENING OF THE LAY TEMPER

I. GENERAL NATURE OF SCEPTICAL THOUGHT

Intellectually, the rationalists and the sceptics of the period were intimately related to the moderates. Their fundamental intellectual position was almost identical, their devotion to religious toleration was as complete, and the direction as well as the structure of their logic was very similar. But the rationalists are marked by several highly significant characteristics that separate them very sharply from their more detached and philosophical contemporaries. Most of the writers whom we regard as rationalists were drawn from a somewhat lower social stratum; most of them had not enjoyed the benefits of a rich academic training; and several of them reflect very clearly indeed the point of view of the rising merchant class.

The thought of the rationalists displays a hard and resolute determination to wrest control of the religious problem from the church and the clergy—to achieve a settlement agreeable to the pragmatic sanity of the lay mind. They met the impact of orthodox pretensions with a harsh and clear threat that the impetus of revolution would be employed to weaken the structure of institutional religion sufficiently to ensure the

religious toleration which they held to be necessary for the survival of civilization, the prosecution of trade, and the maintenance of social order. As these men read history they found that the clergy had been chiefly responsible for rearing the intolerant claims of infallibility, for the persecutions that had despoiled the Church, and for the religious wars that for a century had swept across the face of Western Europe like successive ravages of the plague. No group in the revolutionary period, save the Erastians, was more bitterly anti-clerical; no group was more grimly determined to destroy forever the disciplinary, the secular, and, most significantly, the intellectual leadership which the clergy had for so long exercised. These men, whose intellectual roots were not as thrifty or as deep as those of the moderate thinkers, were driven by their fear of institutional religion and by their dislike of clerical leadership into a kind of lay Christianity that can only be described as anarchistic. They declared that Christianity can be measured in terms no larger than the individual, that no system of creed, and no ultimate authority can be posed which will fasten the individual Christian in a rigid mould of effective organization. They were in consequence contemptuous of creedal systems, darkly hostile to the very concept of a National Church, and often only vaguely Christian by the normal seventeenth-century criteria of definition.

These thinkers were, in fact, Christian only in a personal sense. They viewed religion and religious organization from a perspective which had not existed a half-century earlier. They were, fundamentally, socially and economically minded and were ruthlessly determined to adapt Christianity to the revolutionary requirements of a new order of life. These men wanted social and political stability; they required a religion which, while it retained the ethic of Protestantism, discarded the institutional and dogmatic forms that they regarded as a medieval survival. They demanded, above all else, complete religious freedom as a personal right and as a social necessity. The convictions of these thinkers were so intense, their stake in the new order was so large and so vulnerable, that they threw off the respectable detachment which had kept the moderates aloof, to join battle with the forces which in their

view endangered religious liberty and threatened political freedom.

These writers exhibit, as well, clear traces of the religious scepticism which was beginning seriously to undermine the massive timbers of faith. Scepticism had been very rare indeed prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, but for various reasons it was to strike its roots firmly and deeply into the institutional life of England during the period under survey. Walter Charleton complained in 1652 that "England hath of late produced and doth foster more swarms of atheistical monsters than any age and any nation hath been infected withal." The Westminster Assembly was constantly troubled by reports of blasphemous and irreligious utterances which betrayed the spreading leaven of scepticism. Thus in 1644 a perplexed assize judge in Surrey commented on the case of one Jane Stratten who held that Christ was a bastard, and of John Hart who had returned blasphemous replies to the orthodox catechism to which he had been subjected.¹ A month later the Assembly was shocked by another case involving a man who contended that the soul does not survive the body and that God loves all creatures equally with man.² Thomas Fuller complained that widespread atheism had been bred by the diversity and confusion of the revolutionary era,³ while Stillingfleet, writing in 1662, charged that many had come to "account it a matter of judgment to disbelieve the Scriptures, and a piece of wit to dispute themselves out of the possibility of being happy in another world."⁴

The scepticism of the second half of the seventeenth century was the child of the rationalism of the first half of the century.⁵ The rigidly drawn and intolerantly enforced claims of rival

¹ Hart had returned these answers to the questions put to him:

"Who made you?"—"My Lord of Essex."

"Who redeemed you?"—"Sir W. Waller."

"Who sanctified and preserved you?"—"My Lord of Warwick."

(Lightfoot, John, *The whole works* (ed. by J. R. Pitman) (L., 1823-1824), XIII, 317.)

² *Ibid.*, XIII, 335, 336.

³ Fuller, Thomas, *Holy and profane states* (Cambridge, 1831), 257-263.

⁴ Quoted in Smith, *History of Modern Culture*, I, 401.

⁵ Vide Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 421-453, for a consideration of the rise of rationalism in England.

systems of orthodoxy had driven men into disillusionment and finally into scepticism. The ugly spectacle of religious warfare and the mounting fanaticism of the sects had the inevitable effect of a sceptical reaction to all religious pretensions. Disillusionment was deep-seated in England following the heroic efforts of the Presbyterians to rear a structure of enforced uniformity that retained all of the evils and all of the intolerance of a Church which a war was even then being waged to chasten. Travel in foreign lands and commercial contacts with other peoples had brought men to the disturbing realization that other nations and other races lived happily and morally beyond the pale of orthodoxy and, indeed, beyond the confines of Christianity. It was observed that the fundamental principles of religion and the eternal precepts of morality were common to mankind; religion, in brief, was coming to be conceived in anthropological terms larger than Christianity. This point of view, which was to a degree at least entertained by all the lay groups of the period, received particular emphasis and especially logical development at the hands of the rationalists. Liberal in their theology, broad and enlightened in their interests, hard and deeply persuaded in their opposition to all forms of religious coercion, the rationalists and sceptics were firmly joined in their earnest support of unlimited religious freedom.

2. HENRY ROBINSON, 1605-1664

The boldest, the most original, and certainly one of the most significant of the champions of religious toleration was the versatile merchant, Henry Robinson. The son of a prosperous London tradesman, Robinson was born about 1605 and was educated at Oxford. He was admitted to the Mercers' Company in 1626 and in connection with his business travelled widely on the Continent. His cosmopolitan training and intimate mercantile connections abroad gave him a catholic view unusual in his century and very evidently influenced his thought on the question of religion. In his *Liberty of Conscience* (1643) he pointed out that he had no personal reason for pleading the cause of toleration. His interest in the subject,

he wrote, was purely abstract, since "if at any time I stood in need of liberty and freedom in mine own particular, I am not such a stranger to forreigne countries, both of severall climates and professions, but that I can finde the way thither again to purchase my enlargement."¹

Robinson's first pamphlets were devoted to interesting economic and imperial schemes which he presented with vigour, enthusiasm, and shrewd practicality. It was not until the formulations of the Westminster Assembly began to assume sinister proportions that he expressed any especial interest in the problems of religion. He plunged into the acrid controversies of the period in 1643 and during five critical years pamphlets dedicated to the defence of the theory and to the vindication of the practice of religious freedom poured from his prolific and combative pen. Once religious freedom appeared secure, Robinson returned to the subjects which interested him more vitally, and published several important tracts dealing with economic, financial, and political questions before his death in 1664.

The impressive defence which Robinson lent to religious toleration may be said to mark the maturing of the lay attitude towards the difficult and critical problems of religion with which the seventeenth century was so feverishly grappling. Robinson regarded the issue coolly and pragmatically. England, he held, was on the threshold of a larger and finer national life based upon the Commercial Revolution and her newly won political freedom. No progress could be made, and the great gains dearly purchased in a dreadful war would inevitably be sacrificed, if England were to be torn by chronic religious conflict and wracked by persecution. Robinson therefore threw himself into a vigorous and sustained attack upon all species of religious intolerance during the most decisive period in the religious history of England. In order to ensure the publication of his tracts he imported printers from abroad and set up a private printing establishment in London. Like so many of the laymen of this decade, he allied himself with the Independents, who were knit together by common devotion to

¹ [Robinson, Henry], *Liberty of conscience: or, the sole means to obtaine peace and truth, etc.* (n.pl., 1643), Pref.

the cause of religious freedom, but there is no evidence that the alliance was anything more than one of convenience. Robinson was not so much an Independent as he was hostile to the orthodox pretensions of the Presbyterians, whom he regarded as a grave danger to the peace, security, and prosperity of the nation.¹ He handled theological questions with a cool, brusque, and practical intelligence that was almost rudely contemptuous of the finely spun abstractions of the theologians. Though he struggled manfully to write in the theological jargon typical of the controversies of the age, he was constantly lured into the use of telling arguments drawn from trade, from his wide knowledge of other peoples, and from his extraordinary grasp of historical development. Most of his pamphlets were published anonymously, as he explained later, "not so much for safety of my person, which yet could not escape," as because people at large still expected questions connected with divinity to be handled by the clergy.²

Robinson regarded the argument for religious freedom as obvious and unanswerable. Every human being possesses in his capacity as a man, as a Christian, and as a citizen an indisputable right of private judgment. As Dr. Haller has so well remarked, to Robinson this right appears not so much as a philosophical prerogative as another right of private enterprise or private property. Every sane man realizes that faith cannot be forced, though the clergy have erected and maintained a fiction upon which their impious persecution has been based. This fiction, predicated upon the necessity for the maintenance of Christian unity, has been warped to mean a formal and dead uniformity. The whole fabric of uniformity and the organization of institutional religion have been nothing more than an effort to support the interests of special privileged groups at the hideous price of the suppression of human and spiritual liberties. The structure of persecution could be pre-

¹ Thus in his *Englands safety, in trades encrease, etc.* (L., 1641), and in later economic tracts he urged that the observance of Lent and the two fish days a week should be maintained by strict legislation in order to stimulate the fishing industry which he regarded as the corner-stone of English trade and sea power (p. 16).

² Robinson, Henry, *Brief considerations, concerning the advancement of trade and navigation, etc.* (L., 1649), Pref.

served intact, though at a terrible price, during the Middle Ages. But it cannot survive in the modern world in which trade, nationalism, and a larger knowledge require as the price of advancement an unconditioned religious freedom. The bigoted, the arrogant, and the privileged have yielded but slowly before the pressing requirements of a new and richer world. Persecution and intolerance, Robinson held, were brutish survivals of a mean and slavish past.

The persecuting system, Robinson alleged, was slowly evolved during the Middle Ages when the civil state was prostituted by the clergy to its own arrogant ends. A yoke was solidly riveted upon the conscience of mankind by the perpetration of a fraudulent fiction that the magistrate must intervene in religious causes at the behest of the church. Robinson branded this thesis as a palpable lie which, however, the Presbyterians were grimly seeking to perpetrate anew in England. Not only the New Testament, but common sense makes it abundantly clear that nations and men are not to accept religion at the command of the civil ruler. In England this would have meant the extinction of all religion and all life as the sword of persecution followed the successive and rapid shifts of its rulers in religion. Internationally, it would have meant infinite confusion, bloody wars, and the decay of trade. Robinson demanded that men think lucidly and honestly about the implications of their intolerant mouthings. "If wee may not suffer hereticks to live amongst us," he wrote, "then is the Parliament to blame for suffering German, French, Spanish, and Portugal papists or Dutch Brownists and Anabaptists to live here amongst us, though as marchants . . . since their marchandizing gives them greater advantage of working people to their opinions."¹ Surely it must be apparent that the fragile and complex structure of the modern world would collapse instantly if the ghastly threats of the orthodox were literally enforced.

Incredibly enough there was, in Robinson's judgment, actual danger that the dread spectre of persecution might rise to haunt the world again. For the Presbyterians have fallen into the grave delusion that the special mandates to the Jewish

¹ [Robinson, Henry], *A short answer to A.S. alias Adam Stewart's second part of his overgrown duply to the two brethren* (L., 1644), 2.

Kingdom are applicable in a Christian and modern world. They have wrenched and distorted scripture in order to bring the magistrate under the sway of their haughty wills. They have created in their febrile imagination a state in which they can dominate the magistrate, in which all men are bound by their synods.¹ But surely, upon mature reflection, they too will realize that this delusion is as short-sighted as it is dangerous. "For since the magistrates weapons are coercive, [ma]teriall, carnall, if they take upon them the vindication of spirituall neglect or defect, each state setting up its own, a different worship; men must from time to time take that to be the truest, and subject their consciences to that which hath the sharpest sword to fight for it, still changing religion according to the event of warre."² Such a view subjects salvation to the caprice of circumstance and weakens the state by introducing fatal germs of division and disorder.³ Such a persuasion neglects the obvious compulsion upon the state to guard its own sovereignty and quite ignores the possibility that the civil ruler may decide that, let us say, the Presbyterians are themselves dangerous and corrupt, that they seek the fattest benefices rather than the purest reformation, that the magistrate may by a power which they have delegated to him drive them from the land.⁴

The Presbyterians have in their arrogant and fanatical zeal fallen into a dangerous error. They argue nothing more convincing than the thesis that the magistrate has frequently intervened in spiritual causes, as if that vindicated his *de jure* right to do so. They forget that when they vest religious power in one ruler they grant it to all, for "power is given to them as magistrates and princes, not as Christians; otherwise they might be deposed at any time if they became anti-christian, which is exploded for a popish doctrine."⁵ Hence

¹ [Robinson], *A short answer to A.S.*, 8.

² [Robinson, Henry], *Some few considerations propounded . . . by Mr. Henry Robinson in a letter to Mr. Iohn Dury, etc.* (L., 1646), 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁴ [Robinson], *A short answer to A.S.*, 8.

⁵ [Robinson, Henry], *The falshood of Mr. William Prynn's Truth triumphing, etc.* (L., 1645), 14; *et vide* [Robinson, Henry], *A moderate answer to Mr. Prins full reply to certaine observations on his first twelve questions . . . a short description of the congregational way discovered. Some arguments for indulgence to tender consciences modestly propounded* (L., 1645), 18-19.

whoever grants power in religious government to the civil ruler must lend obedience to the fallible and erratic judgment of the ruler and thereby makes religion subject to the mercy of historical accident.¹ The Presbyterians, indeed, stand convicted by their own logic because of their manful resistance to the episcopal tyranny so recently overthrown. They have gravely and formally pinned "the gospel with its propagation and whole affaires upon civill powers; the greatest share . . . whereof . . . is in the hands of Turkes or infidels."² The mark of blood, the stigma of fanatical zeal, is upon them. They clearly desire and contrive to secure a puppet ruler who will destroy those whom they imperiously brand as heretical. They are dangerous men and England must charge them with the guilt which they have taken upon themselves.

The fatal error into which the Presbyterians have fallen, Robinson argued, was the consequence of their mistaken conception of the Church. They are devoted to the ideal of a National Church, to the goal of a formal uniformity which can be gained in no other way than by the weapons of persecution. They labour under the monstrous delusion that seas and rivers form the boundaries between churches, between truth and error.³ They betray by their every utterance a basic misunderstanding of the nature of Christianity and a complete misapprehension concerning the structure of the Church of Christ. They have declared God's salvation to be national, and in impudent violation of the express commandments of God have sought to frame a Church according to their own prescription.⁴ They have perverted and distorted the Holy Scriptures in an effort to discover sanctions for the philosophy of persecution which undergirds their church. We are commanded to walk together in unity of spirit, it is true, but we are not required to walk to the gallows together. The Christian world is not bound by the national and peculiarly legal church of the Jews. "Under the gospel its otherwise; Christ being come himselfe, as king of His church, hath made a covenant with no nation under heaven, but in every nation

¹ [Robinson], *Falshood of . . . Prym's Truth triumphing*, 18-19.

² *Ibid.*, 21.

³ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 4.

⁴ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 28.

he that feares Him is accepted with Him; His laws being onely spirituall, and that concerning conscience."¹ There can be no greater iniquity than that shown by vain and intolerant men who seek to bind the free spirit and genius of the Church into the inflexible and meaningless moulds of a dead national conformity.

It is incredible, Robinson submitted, that England, which so recently rose up to destroy root and branch one persecuting national establishment, could now embrace another. For it was this persecuting authority that drove the Puritans from England to "carry with them their gifts, arts, and manufactures into other countries, to the greatest detreiment of this common-wealth." But Puritanism, itself so recently persecuted, now mans the same gallows for its imagined foes. Is it possible, Robinson enquired, that God has delivered them out of persecution "to the end they might be inabled to persecute their brethren"?² Presbyterianism displays precisely that malignancy which caused popery and prelacy to suffer destruction. England has apparently not learned the lesson which the horror of war should have taught her. Perhaps those moderates who pointed out "that if they should cut the bishops locks, a little regulate them, their hair would soon grow again, and pull down the common-wealth about us all" were correct in their fear of the clerical mentality. For England will gain less than nothing if the bishops are to be replaced by the presbyters. Is it not evident that the Presbyterians display the same intolerant zeal, the same dangerous demand for a National Church, and precisely the same disposition to destroy the Christian conscience?³

Having denounced with vigorous logic the orthodox ideal of a National Church, Robinson sought to define as clearly as possible the true Church of Christ in which liberty and spiritual freedom would flourish. He followed closely the classical congregational conception when he declared that the true visible Church could be regarded as nothing other than "a company of believers, joining themselves together in the

¹ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 9.

² [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 32.

³ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 15-17.

name of Christ" for the worship of God.¹ The constitution and government of this Church cannot and need not be precisely defined since it is nothing more than a loose frame within which individually independent men and women worship. Obviously such a Church possesses the inherent right to exercise control over its membership and is vested with capacity to exclude by excommunication those who fail to exhibit the evidences of grace which it requires. No visible Church can consist wholly of the elect, though it may limit its composition to those who "can be judged by the saints to be elect. If men be not saved, its not because the church is deceived, but themselves: the church goes only on these probable rules of judging by which the word prescribes."² The Church, then, should cleanse itself scrupulously with the spiritual agencies with which it is invested, though the limits of its discipline are strictly confined to those persons who have voluntarily submitted to its constitution. Since true Churches evolve slowly and painfully, they can never be unspotted with error. But no progress can be made until the carnal heritage of the national church ideal has been renounced,³ and until men realize that absolute freedom of separation, of growth, and of personal judgment are essential to the nature of the true Church. Without doubt the gravest danger inherent in Presbyterianism is the fact that it seeks to crystallize into rigid formulae the free and elastic quality of the true Church. These stiffly orthodox spirits endeavour to impose a prescriptive order and worship which will have the inevitable effect of stifling and paralysing the free play of God's spirit and destroying that freedom essential to the attainment of salvation. They "not only set their posts by Gods posts, but they lay aside His, and enjoin theirs only to be used" as pillars of the Church of Christ.⁴

Robinson's keen and quick lay intelligence detected glaring flaws in the ossified structure of the Calvinistic logic. He charged that Calvinism had been hoist with its own petard,

¹ [Robinson, Henry], *An answer to Mr. John Dury his letter which he writ from the Hague to Mr. Thomas Goodwin. Mr. Philip Nye. Mr. Samuel Hartlie [sic], etc.* (L., 1644), 1.

² [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 29-30.

³ [Robinson], *An answer to Mr. John Dury*, 2-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

having been entrapped in an inconsistency born of intolerance. For, on the one hand, the Presbyterians hold stubbornly to the conviction that the Church must be national in scope and membership. Yet, with the next breath, they insist upon a disciplinary system so inflexibly conceived and so harshly executed as to be tantamount to persecution. They are apparently prepared to wage war for the principle of the National Church and then to decimate it by rigorously weeding out those whom they believe to be lost. This position lacks reason and charity.¹ They are afflicted by a coercive and persecuting zeal which they have inherited from Rome and by a complete misunderstanding of the spiritual nature of worship. Christians must be left completely free, at liberty to walk with any communion or alone in the sight of God.² The paralysing arm of persecution must be lifted from the Church if men are to emerge into the larger freedom and the more abundant life which lie within their easy grasp.

Christian zeal, Robinson constantly emphasized, has slowly deteriorated into a raging fury of intolerance. Calm moderation and reasonableness of temper are mental attitudes necessary to the Christian and essential for the restoration of religious peace in Europe. The zealous have long despised those moderate spirits who "endeavour to qualifie" the counsels of extremism. In England this rash of intolerance has mounted up in a scourge of civil war which promises to have no other result than the establishment of still another spiritual tyranny. It is the peculiar evil of war, he urged, that fanaticism triumphs upon the ruins of moderation, though temperate men and temperate counsels can alone bring an enduring peace to a distracted kingdom. And certainly it is true that the establishment of unconditional liberty of conscience is the prime requirement for the restoration of peace. All the evils of extremism are bound up in the arrogance and intolerance that undergird religious persecution.³ The rage of persecution has laid reason in ruins and has destroyed that charity which is the attribute of the Christian man. Reason must be enthroned

¹ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 30-31.

² [Robinson], *An answer to Mr. John Dury*, 12.

³ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, Pref.

again before the angry and destructive waves of brutish force can be calmed.

The individual reason, Robinson staunchly insisted, must in the last analysis determine the faith of every human being without hindrance. Men cannot be bound by the dicta of authority which invade their reason and conscience. No man can proceed farther than his reason takes him. We must reflect that "God hath put the understanding in a man, to be a light to his path," that "a mans understanding is to a mans practice, as the eye to the body, without which it cannot walk safely."¹ Since force can save no man, the ripening of knowledge and faith is best attained when men are left completely free. Persecution has bound nations and people in the toils of error; has deluded simple souls into the strange notion that birth, education, and environment can endow men with a rational and a living faith; and has condemned countless human beings who were not permitted to take "their religion upon choice or triall."²

Religious persecution, in Robinson's reasoned judgment, was criminal even when all the postulates of orthodoxy were admitted, while to his rationalistic intelligence it was likewise stupid. Religious coercion is the tool of factions that lay false claim to an absolute knowledge of truth. Such a pretence, Robinson sternly asserted, is at best a fanatical delusion, at worst a damnable fraud. Divine truth is not easily apprehended and cannot be fully understood by mortal minds. No man can be required to do more than work out his own salvation from those fragments of truth comprehended by his reason. It is probable that God has left His meaning obscure in order "to make us more diligent and inquisitive in the search of truth, that we might not be over confident and presumptuous of our owne opinions," and to teach us that we must require absolute liberty in framing the edifice of our faith.³ We must gain our due measure of truth by quiet contemplation, by unhurried search, and by rational persuasion. This is the

¹ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 37.

² [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 4.

³ [Robinson, Henry], *John the Baptist, forerunner of Christ Iesus: or, a necessity for liberty of conscience, etc.* (L., 1644), 43.

Christian truth which we must seek. This is the truth in which we may live and die in quiet security; "passions and railing were never wont to be her companions; peace, gentleness, and meeknesse ever attended her as handmaids."¹

Robinson displayed a bold and radical intelligence in his consideration of the nature of religious truth. We must realize, he argued, that since salvation is an individual matter, truth is itself relative. No man possesses completely the truth which God and nature reveal, nor need he, since the capacity and the subjective needs of all men differ. It would appear that our knowledge of truth is organic, that God gradually "reveales more and more of the gospel every day in a fuller and clearer manner" as the Christian intelligence gains in maturity and insight.² But the essentials of faith, by which men have been saved in all nations and in all ages, are very simple and are universally entertained. Thus, he boldly suggests, Catholics and Protestants stand in hateful and bloody divisions over circumstantial matters that bear no relation whatever to the essentials of faith.³ Even the profound schism between them on the doctrine of the eucharist cannot be said "spiritually" to divide them. The human race proceeds in a slow and halting fashion towards a richer knowledge of truth, but its gains are sure and solid only so long as the vital springs of freedom are not choked by the clinging moss of persecution. Churches may be erected, forms and ritual may be instituted, discipline may be imposed, and doctrinal systems may be elaborated, but all these things are nothing more than conveniences of faith. They must not be imposed by the slightest pressure upon the free conscience of mankind. "If the scriptures and such reasons as they produce, through my infirmity and weaknesse, cannot satisfie my conscience," Robinson enquired, "has fraile mankinde the infinite power of God at their disposall," to compel me to a worship or a faith which reason and conscience do not accept?⁴

Intellectual freedom, then, is necessary for the attainment and enlargement of our knowledge of truth; religious freedom is the condition of our salvation. No state and no church that

¹ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 1.

³ [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 25-26.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

does not admit religious toleration as the corner-stone of its philosophy and organization can lay valid claim to the title of Christian. The human conscience has lain under a grievous and crushing burden of persecution which has stifled its natural yearning for a larger knowledge of truth, which has stunted the precious potentialities with which the spirit of man is instinct. A quiet but sturdy protest against the tyranny which impious and arrogant men have for so long imposed has welled up into a crusade dedicated to the attainment of that liberty with which God has endowed every human being. But so subtle and so fanatical are those who desire to enforce their fallible glosses upon other men that England, only recently delivered from the tyranny of persecution, once more stands in grave danger of accepting still another yoke. The Presbyterians, Robinson alleged at the very beginning of the sessions of the Westminster Assembly, constituted a far more serious menace to liberty of conscience than had the harsh and blundering policy of Archbishop Laud.

Robinson's attack upon Presbyterianism was fearless, searching, and sustained. He held that the orthodox were guilty of usurping a spiritual authority which both reason and scripture clearly denied to them. They have hopelessly confused the temporal with the spiritual spheres, have sought to overwhelm moderate and reasonable men by the very fury of their fanaticism, and have entrapped the ignorant by staggering pretensions to a power and a knowledge denied to mortal men.¹ Directly the authority of the bishops, against which they fought so valiantly, had been overthrown, it became evident that these zealots intended nothing less than the arrogation of that coercive power for their own sectarian ends. They now declare themselves competent to deliver the judgments of God, to manacle the conscience of His Saints, and to confine men in the worship of their Creator to the narrow slits of their own peculiar light.² "What availeth it," Robinson demanded, "to have the head of one lordly episcopall prelate cut off, when a hydra, a multitude, above 77 times as many presbytirall pre-

¹ [Robinson], *Falshood of . . . Prynne's Truth triumphing*, 5-7.

² [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, Pref.; *A short answer to A.S.*, 21-25.

lates succeed instead thereof?"¹ So deluded and frantic have these men become that they have by admission substituted force for persuasion as the agency of faith. They have quite forgotten that "such as must be whipt into the faith . . . so many lashes more, will . . . easily whip them out again."² They have had the effrontery to ask England to transfer the lash from one hand to another. Surely England will see that she stands in even greater danger from Presbyterianism than from Episcopacy. For the Calvinists claim a far more rigid infallibility; they endeavour to prescribe the exact limits of truth with an absolute authority; and they seek to impose a discipline riveted on with the steel of fanatical resolution. This sect, the most insidious of all enemies of religious toleration and of Christian moderation, must at any cost be humbled.

Indeed, the remarkably dispassionate Robinson stoutly maintained, religious freedom had far less to fear from the Anglo-Catholics than from the orthodox leadership of the Westminster Assembly. Robinson held that the recently published *Diary* of Archbishop Laud³ disclosed "eminent signes of a morall noble pious minde, according to such weake principles as hee had beene bred up in."⁴ Laud and his party were brought to ruin when they sought by coercive means to fasten upon England a system of "truth" in which they believed too intensely. Thus does zeal stray into persecution. The persecutors are the worst of all the enemies of the Church and of society. They "are worse than birds and beasts of rapine . . . beares and lions are not so hurtfull in a country, as a misguided

¹ [Robinson], *Falshood of . . . Prynne's Truth triumphing*, 9. In his *Moderate answer* Robinson struck out with equal vigour against the intolerance of Presbyterianism. Episcopacy, he wrote, was a "lion let go about without its chains," but Presbyterianism is an equally dangerous lion now threatening to break its fetters. "The bishops power," he warned, "in a presbytery is dilated from 26 unto 600. What one could not reach to do, you may be sure many will; and as the bishops would call men puritans and non-conformists, and so persecute them; so will the presbytery call men schismatics, hereticks, antinomians, separatists, and do the like." (Pp. 14-15.)

² [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 59.

³ Robinson refers here to the *Breviate of the life of William Laud, etc.*, published by Prynne in 1644 as part of the bitter attack of the extreme Puritan group on the character of the Archbishop and on the aims of the party of which he was leader.

⁴ [Robinson], *Falshood of . . . Prynne's Truth triumphing*, 9-10.

zeale growne furious." Persecution looses the floods of hate and bloody violence which must eventually destroy the very structure of human institutions. Those who seek to persecute, the author suggested, are driven to such desperate measures by an overwhelming sense of their own insecurity. This is especially true of the Presbyterians, who, Robinson manfully asserted, constituted nothing more than a minority sect in the nation. Those who face reality honestly realize, he wrote, that England remains predominantly Anglican and that if the true wishes of the country were consulted a modified Anglican Establishment would be erected.¹

Despite the traditional loyalty of the nation to the Anglican Establishment, it has been repudiated because its rigidity was incompatible with a free and vital spiritual life. England must be quite as resolved to disown the Presbyterians, who exhibit precisely the same intolerant disposition. Christ's authority over His Church is unlimited and "whosoever layes claim thereunto to exercise it according to any other rule, subjects himself to the greatest temptation of becomming a boundlesse tyrant, and the people to be enthralled by the most arbitrary and wretched tyranny and vassalage . . . under heaven."² No man and no sect can claim to determine between truth and heresy without usurping the prerogatives of Almighty God. Whoever assumes the sceptre of infallibility must present irrefutable proofs of the authority which he claims and must wait patiently until other men are persuaded that the truth which has been proclaimed proceeds from God.³ This axiom, Robinson submitted, must be applied to the Westminster Assembly, which is determined to impose upon a recalcitrant nation a truth which is by no means self-evident. "They are the Presbyterian doctors whose asses must passe for trumpeters, and whose geese are swans; whose wares must be thought better . . . whatever they say must be accounted seraphical; and mechanicks, all lay-men wave their owne reason and religion whilst they worship their's."⁴

Both Catholicism and Protestantism are infected with a virus

¹ This admission, which Robinson made upon several occasions, is almost unique among the vigorous supporters of the parliamentary cause. It demonstrates the remarkable objectivity and the almost brutal truthfulness of this powerful intellect.

² [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 38.

³ [Robinson], *A short answer to A.S.*, 15-17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

of intolerance that is slowly wasting their Christian character. They have, with a desperation born of fear and senseless arrogance, entrusted to the state a capacity which must in the end destroy religion. Human reasoning has been tragically confused. Men would regard it as an insupportable tyranny if the state sought to order the conduct of business, of the arts, or of science. Yet they have surrendered the priceless prerogative of religious freedom to a fickle and irresponsible authority. Men cannot be saved by proxy or by the edicts of assemblies; no authority can relieve us of the ultimate responsibility for our own spiritual fate. "I desire every Christian heart to consider," Robinson earnestly pleaded, and to "resolve in his saddest and most retired thoughts, whether it be not a much safer way in spirituall affaires, for every particular man to understand his owne estate betwixt God and himselfe, and manage his own busines."¹ We must reflect that faith which is not grounded in the free persuasion of reason is both unworthy and unavailing. Those who grasp the cudgels of coercive authority are confounded by the very nature of religious faith. No other course remains but to bestow upon every man an explicit right to choose his own religion according to his fallible understanding, with the assurance that "a good meaning and intention is greatly excusable before God, though it were in an erroneous way of serving him."² So precious and so essential is this freedom of the spirit that political liberty fades into insignificance beside it. "The civill lawes permit subjects to defend their estates with swords and guns; but what kinde of laws are those which expose men naked, to have their religion and consciences assaulted?"³ This is the ideal of liberty to which men have dedicated themselves in England; this holy cause alone lends meaning and morality to a frightful civil war.⁴

¹ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 40.

² [Robinson], *A short answer to A.S.*, 19.

³ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 40.

⁴ Robinson eloquently urged that religion becomes meaningless when it is left at the mercy of the dominant party within any state. England, he submitted, has learned this and has at last tasted of the wine of liberty of conscience. She can never again be forced into the tyrannous discipline of an exclusive National Church, nor can the Civil War be ended until this principle has been established in law by an unconditional guarantee of liberty of conscience. (*Liberty of conscience*, 5.)

The intolerant claims of exclusive church systems, Robinson sought to demonstrate, were based upon a complete misunderstanding of the nature of spiritual unity. Men instinctively crave authority and have endeavoured to break a living faith into tiny fragments which they might order and dominate. Such bigoted and worldly spirits blaspheme God when they call themselves Catholic. The churches of their creation clearly reflect the worldly interests, the ambitions, and the compromises of a determined faction whose chief concern is to secure and perpetuate its own dominance.¹ It may be granted that there is "but one true religion, one true faith and way to heaven; But who can tell mee the precise and just precincts thereof? What mean they by one true religion, one way, one faith? The Papists, Luthrans, Calvinists, all Episcopal and Presbyterian disciplind men generally are of this opinion; each of them, whole nations and people, damn for the most part hand over head, all other professions but his own. . . . Would it not be wonder if this circumference, this little continent of earth, should satisfie the vast desires of such, who seem to think, that the heavens so infinitely more capacious, were only made for them and some few of their familiars."² Can such imperious spirits realize that they exclude from salvation not only the pagans and the just men of antiquity, but all men in all the Christian Churches who differ from their puny formulations? The logic of intolerance recoils upon itself to stand condemned by every tuition of instinct, reason, and religion.

The human race learns but slowly and painfully the lessons which reason and history should bestow upon it. Yet, so Robinson believed, bitter experience had at last taught men the awful danger and the insidious evil inherent in religious persecution. The sects were slowly becoming less certain of their own infallibility and had been driven to admit that God reveals His truth to mankind and to churches but partially and obscurely.³ Faith, they have discovered, is a delicate plant which, if it is to remain vital, must be left completely free to flourish as the roots of reason strike deeper into the rich soil of

¹ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 46-47.

² [Robinson], *A short answer to A.S.*, 25-26.

³ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 48-49.

truth. Faith is organic: men grow slowly in their spiritual statures and their religious life is stunted and destroyed when they are enchained by an arbitrary authority.¹ Faith belongs to the individual Christian as an exclusive and personal possession; it cannot be made the plaything of an erratic authority or left subject to historical circumstances.² Christ requires that every man be left at liberty to worship Him according to the dictates of a reasonable and personal faith. How, Robinson demanded, can a weak servant of Christ lend his due obedience, "if he shall be silenced or imprisoned by a superiour power, for wanting some other parcell of truth, or interweaving therewith some erroneous doctrine" required by an intolerant authority?³ The issue of liberty of conscience, the author concluded, is susceptible of no compromise. Either men must be granted the absolute spiritual freedom which their God has ordained for them, or faith itself will be stifled by the choking coils of a persecuting power, itself fallible, irreligious, and self-condemned.⁴

Robinson had repudiated without a trace of nostalgia the historic conception of the Exclusive Church and the ideal of uniformity. He brought all the arguments which a keen and fertile mind could muster to bear against the assumption of infallibility—an assumption that must necessarily underlie a coercive ecclesiastical structure. At the same time he dismissed with a rude secular contempt the frantic plea of the Westminster Assembly that a godly national discipline could alone prevent the immediate deterioration of organized religion in England. Robinson was one of the first of the influential thinkers in England to detect the danger which Presbyterianism offered to religious liberty, to attack the orthodox position directly and honestly, and to embrace without reservations all of the implications of unconditional religious liberty. He had undertaken the vigorous defence of principles which a confused and frightened nation as yet scarcely dared to contemplate. The London merchant bluntly asserted that every exclusive church was by definition and constitution intolerant and hence

¹ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 50.

² [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 66-68.

³ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

⁴ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 44.

imperfectly Christian. He summoned England to the view that religious liberty must be engrafted into the constitution of the state if Christianity and an ordered society were to be preserved.

Robinson sought to fortify this position by a careful examination of the nature and effect of persecution upon the individual, the church, and the state. His frankly secular mind was peculiarly sensitive to all species of religious pressure, whether labelled with the Anglican plea of uniformity, the Calvinistic insistence upon discipline, or the sectarian assertion of certainty of grace. His sweeping dictum that the slightest degree of external pressure in matters of faith, proceeding from whatever pretext, constituted persecution not only sharpened the delimitation of the frontiers of the discussion but vastly enlarged the sphere of the religious liberty which the laity in England required.

The persecuting faith, Robinson wrote, demands that men submit to a particular definition of truth and to a peculiar type of worship before they are convinced in reason of their validity. This is to require of men far more than God demands.¹ Hence when any man is brought unwillingly under the jurisdiction of the Church he is subjected to persecution.² The human mind can conjure up no more grievous tyranny than the rude violation of reason and conscience by an external authority.³ Such pressure can only be denominated persecution, however noble its pretensions may be. The grossest tyranny has masqueraded under the guise of uniformity; the most cruel persecutions have been undertaken under the plea that the Church must be preserved against heresies. Even the blindest of the zealous must upon reflection realize that "the more severitie is used" against errors, "the more they will grow: for that which is opposed and cried out against, men will the more pry into; bishops made more puritans against their will, then ever was before . . . errors are like camorile, the more you tread them downe, the more they will grow, let them alone they will fall off themselves."⁴

None of the churches will admit the charge of persecution,

¹ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 19.

² [Robinson], *Answer to Mr. John Dury*, 2.

³ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 19-20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

yet while they deny the name they all embrace the fact. Great ingenuity has been displayed by divines in creating new and impressive rationalizations by which persecution could be perpetrated without open scandal. But these orthodox sophistries cannot withstand even casual analysis. The various positions that have been assumed all involve the exercise of force against dissent, and this constitutes persecution. The Catholics have demonstrated that coercion can effect a dead uniformity of profession in a limited area for a limited time, and all who demand the coercion of conscience emulate their impious success however loudly they may disclaim the Romanist methods.¹ Those sects that proudly arrogate to themselves the title of orthodox are inflamed by a mad zeal against the ineradicable fact of human variation. They resemble a man "gone astray that hath lost himselfe in some by-paths, who the longer or the faster that he goeth, is still more out of his way, and has the farther to return againe."² It would almost seem as if such sects were in desperate revolt against the mercy of God, as if they were determined to be tyrannous where God is charitable. With unbelievable presumption these factions estimate their own fallible opinions so highly that they persecute all who differ from them. The Church, the knowledge of truth, and the vitality of Christianity have been paralysed by a stubborn refusal to recognize the certain fact that the conscience of man is free. Christendom has been enthralled for so long in the chains of persecution that it is "not much unlike to people suddenly waked out of a deep sleep by the hideous crying of fire, fire, whose eyes being dazled with the sight thereof, and their understanding surprised . . . forthwith cast themselves downe staires, or out at window to their destruction."³ Men have awakened but slowly from the paralysis which has for so long benumbed the limbs of faith; men are too dazed after the long sleep of oppression to seize the prize of liberty which lies within their grasp.

Not only is persecution destructive to the very nature of religion, Robinson argued, but it is peculiarly dangerous to the complex structure of the modern world that has arisen upon the ruins of the Middle Ages. Europe has been driven by harsh

¹ [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 43-45.

² *Ibid.*, 57-58.

³ *Ibid.*, 58.

experience to accept the principle of international toleration, yet numerous states still cling to the suicidal policy of persecution within their own boundaries. Economic ruin has been courted by driving substantial citizens into exile and the economy of the state endangered by systematic exactions calculated to eradicate dissent. "If a pagan nation may not be invaded in their territories, because they will not be of our religion, nor a neighbouring Christian people differing from us in some opinions, why should a particular man have his own lambe, his pittance taken from him for refusing only to be of a religion?"¹ Europe will find order and peace only when liberty of worship is limited by no other restriction than peaceful conduct. If the Christian nations persist in the pursuit of the phantom of uniformity, terrible and disruptive consequences will inevitably ensue. For persecution can neither recover men from error nor bend them to the will of a dominant party. God has not sanctified force to such an end, "nay, there is nothing more hardens men in their error then such a course, and makes them more refractory and incorrigible."² Every man must in the nature of his being regard his own religion as the true one. Tolerance and peace can be attained only when all men and all states recognize the obvious fact that every human being must in the end work out his own spiritual destiny.

Every plea of reason and religion cries out against the crime of persecution. And it is the peculiar tragedy of Christian history that, even granting the patently false postulates of the intolerant churches, persecution cannot accomplish its announced ends. Physical or spiritual coercion may drive men to a formal profession of uniformity, but such pressure cannot "arrive to the heart, and whatever externall meanes may be used, they worke only upon the body, and cannot reach the soule." The cruel engine of persecution is powerless in its assault upon the human conscience for the simple reason that "a man of himselfe cannot possibly beleieve what he himselfe desires to beleieve, before his judgement and understanding be convinced."³ The engine of persecution stands helpless before

¹ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 9.

² [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 42.

³ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 51.

the fact that so long as men have reason they will have different understandings. "Herein is the manifold wisdome, and fulnesse of God seen, in giving different gifts to men; and untill you can compound all men into one head and reason" the objectives of persecution can never be attained.¹

Force, we may conclude then, is powerless to accomplish its impious purposes. The heart and soul of man cannot be won by its brutal methods. Surely, Robinson urged, the history of a cruel century had abundantly demonstrated this primary dictum of reason. It should be evident that the terrorism of Mary Tudor accomplished nothing for Roman Catholicism in England. Robinson testified from personal observation that English merchants compelled to attend Roman Catholic services abroad ignored the spiritual message and "purposely send their eyes a gadding after beauty."² Force has never been competent to change the convictions of any determined man. For religion is spiritual in its nature and can be instilled by none other than spiritual means. Even the most intolerant zealots must in all honesty admit this truism. They fanatically proclaim that heretics should suffer death, yet in their hearts they know that good men should not be destroyed for opinions held in conscience. But so long as the barbarous doctrine of persecution remains part of orthodox theory, so long as a proud and ambitious clergy aspires to secure its own dominion, so long as toleration is denied by law, Europe and Christianity will remain the prey of an awful scourge of erratic and pointless persecution.

Finally, Robinson submitted, the doctrine and practice of persecution stand condemned because it stultifies a body of truth which is organic. The announced goal of all religious persecution is to produce a uniformity of belief "which never hath been yet, nor never is to be expected while we are here; for as long as men have reason in them, and a free understanding, there will be different apprehensions of things."³ The very essence of truth would consequently be destroyed if men could be forced into one mould of religious opinion and

¹ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 43.

² [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 6.

³ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 43.

expression. The ideal of uniformity is in fact nothing more than a rationalization of the clergy designed to make respectable their effort to perpetuate their own power. Positive error is actually far more desirable than the blind and irrational indifference which a coercive church instils in mankind. There is at least a negative, an elementary virtue in active error. It suggests a mind that is groping for truth, and so long as the reason of the heretic remains free he will in due season find God.¹ But the flaming scourge of persecution lays waste the tender plant of truth and drives Christians into the miserable slavery of hypocrisy. It stands condemned as the greatest of the enemies of "knowledge and growth in religion," since it "puts out mens own eyes and judgment, and ties them to see by others; every man" under its cruel whip "will be affraid to read the Scriptures, or search them thoroughly, for if God should dart in any light from them, or his own ingenuity thorough the strength of his reason should be forced to dissent from the multitude, either he must stifle in the birth his divine conception . . . or else he must dissemble his judgment" to the ruin of his immortal soul.²

No defensible grounds exist, Robinson concluded, for the employment of the slightest compulsion in matters of faith. Every Christian, and certainly the orthodox who are so sure of the faith which they profess, must believe that truth has nothing to fear from the assaults of error. It must be granted that there is heresy and that it is a serious matter, but it can be reduced by none other than spiritual agencies. It must be left quite unmolested with the assurance that God's will will be done in its correction or final punishment. We should pause in our coercive courses to reflect that many an heretic has gladly delivered his body to be burned as a token of his faith; surely those who have attained a knowledge of an ineffable truth may meet error with an equal confidence and serenity.³

Robinson had lent to the problem of religious persecution an astute, cogent, and fearless criticism. He sought to fasten the charge of persecution upon all species of religious coercion,

¹ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 51-52, 56.

² [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 44.

³ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 58-59.

whether undertaken in the interests of Puritanism, Anglicanism, or Catholicism. As a layman of decidedly rationalistic tendencies he was sufficiently withdrawn from the welter of struggling "truths" to see with refreshing clarity that innate intolerance lay deep in every orthodoxy of his day. His tone was sharp and his logic resolute, and he incurred the antagonism of powerful and dangerous enemies in his crusade for an unlimited spiritual liberty. But he had done the cause of toleration a service of the first magnitude. Having swept away the central pillars of the structure of persecution, he was prepared to come to grips with the problem of heresy—an issue which few of the most determined champions of religious liberty in the seventeenth century had dared face in the light of its full and momentous significance.

If we heed the Bible and the example of Christ's ministry, Robinson held, the existence of heresy raises no problem that need confound our faith. Nothing could be more evident than that heretics are to plague the Church and that no corporal pressure may be brought to bear upon them. We are commanded to cast them out of the Church, but their final punishment or salvation has been left strictly in the hands of God.¹ When we destroy the heretic we condemn him eternally, whereas God may have intended his salvation. Thus the persecutor dips his own hands in blood and subverts the sovereignty of God. We have been taught that there will always be heresies and we have been enjoined to suffer them "to bee with all possible freedom examined and debated, which must necessarily infer the most acknowledged truths themselves, to be subject to the same proceeding, in that what one man, church or nation takes to be truth, another perhaps accounts no lesse then heresie."² We attain a firm and certain knowledge of truth by freely trying all things; we gain strength of spirit when our faith develops slowly from our own subjective resources. The punishment of heresy therefore creates phantoms which obscure, when they do not destroy, the true nature of religion.

Natural reason and common observation should teach us quite as certainly that heresy may not be molested. We simply

¹ [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 62-63.

² [Robinson], *Some few considerations*, 7.

lack the capacity to explore into the dim recesses of faith and belief. Thus when a convicted heretic repents upon the scaffold he ceases, in so far as we can tell, to be an heretic, and the grounds which have been alleged for his death are removed. Yet such a man may, and very probably will, relapse again on the morrow. No human agency can infallibly determine or demonstrate the fact of heresy, and even if it could it still would lack the power to punish the offence. "How can you bee infallibly assured that a man is sufficiently convinced, if he himselfe denies it?" Robinson demanded. "How know you which is Gods houre for convincing of a man? May not you likewise possibly interpret a dulnesse of apprehension in him, or your owne want of truly and well informing him, to bee his obstinate wilfull rejecting of the truth?"¹ Even the most arrogant persecutors cannot escape from the logic of these facts. Indeed, they dare not honestly face the requirements of religion or the instruction of logic. They rather accomplish their ends by confusing the relation of church and state, by playing upon the fears of the ignorant, and by an astounding and complex duplicity of motives and actions. Such men are never logical. They vent their rage on the defenceless and the humble. Why do they not, if they speak honestly, "with one accord . . . assault and cut the throats of all the papists they . . . meet withall" and "knock all children on the head, because they speake not so readily or plainly" as their own?² These haughty and dangerous bigots must be persuaded to admit that we know nothing concerning another man's grace and very little about our own. We proceed recklessly and impiously indeed when we press against others fallible charges of heresy.

Men, churches, and nations have moved with uncertain steps and pathetic blunders towards the truth which they have all sought. Humanity has never been afforded the opportunity to enjoy the freedom which God intended for it. Thus the Spaniard is taught that he may attain faith only in Catholicism; thus every intolerant church binds its helpless members to a partial and static knowledge of truth. It is significant, Robinson observed, that when men are asked in what country they would choose to be born, they reply, "in their own or in Holland."

¹ [Robinson], *A short answer to A.S.*, 10.

² *Ibid.*, 12, 14.

For in Holland all men have been extended the means of acquiring truth for themselves without molestation. Furthermore, Robinson argued with keen penetration, the folly of persecution may be demonstrated in still another way. If there are twenty sects in a state and one, becoming dominant, extirpates the others, the chances are exactly nineteen to one that the true Church in that land has been destroyed.¹ If, on the other hand, men are permitted to search freely for truth, no man will be denied the opportunity to discover that knowledge which is essential for his salvation.

Every church has sought to establish its exclusive character by arrogantly defining the areas which lie beyond its limited purview as a morass of error and heresy. They have all condemned the persecution of their own members as an unspeakable tyranny, while girding their loins with the sword of persecution.² The most frantic and ingenious minds have not as yet adduced an atom of valid proof in support of the cause of persecution. Every argument of the intolerant can be reduced to the plea that unrestrained heresy will destroy the Church. No more criminally specious position could be entertained. For evidently God "spares not these erroneous beleivers or hereticks that they might seduce and pervert the faithfull . . . but that the faithfull might in due time reduce the misbeleivers unto the truth."³ No church can ever hope to make its conception of religion, its gloss on doctrine, prevail so long as it undertakes its task with the sword of persecution in hand. Men are won by gentleness, reason, and persuasion; force is calculated to freeze their lips into the shape of uniformity while it hardens their hearts in the convictions previously entertained.⁴ Heresy must be left scrupulously alone. Even the angels in heaven are forbidden to pull up the tares which God has reserved for His own inscrutable judgment and disposition. We may be sure that had God given leave even to the true Church to pull up the tares of

¹ [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 85.

² Yet, "if it be lawfull for any people or religion to persecute or keep inquisition houses . . . tis lawfull to all alike; neither can any word be spoken which in the judgement of rationall indifferent men, such as are not concerned in the quarrel," can lend to persecution either reason or morality. ([Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 87 [mispaged].)

³ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

error, "each false church pretending to be the only true one, would have appropriated the commission . . . and so have gone to worke pulling up more wheat than tares."¹

Our hatred of heresy really arises from our fear of the responsibilities imposed on us by truth. We are so puny in our faith that we are harsher and more dogmatic in our condemnations than God Himself. The righteous man has nothing to fear from error. He is fully cognizant of the fact that, when faith gains the liberty which its vitality requires, errors will inevitably spring up even amongst good people. But the Christian has divine assurance that truth will easily overcome heresy so long as liberty of conscience and freedom of enquiry prevail. He is deeply persuaded that "every sect or heresie obtrudes her errorrs with as great vehemencie, as the professours of the truth . . . and neither can alleadge one tittle advantage, wherefore any one in humane reason should rather yeeld or be convinced by the other, untill the evidence of truth prevaile upon the conscience."² All men of true faith, all churches that seek to live, all nations that search for the good life must renounce once and for all the delusion of heresy. They must realize that the human spirit cannot be broken, that convictions cannot be destroyed by fiat, and that the disease of error cannot be cured by cruelty.³ They must repudiate the dead and formal uniformity towards which Christendom has for so long striven, recalling that it "is the glory of the saints, that though their light differ, yet their hearts are one." Only then will the Church gain vitality, the state the peace of which it has been despoiled, and mankind the tolerance and freedom in which the Kingdom of God may be attained.

Robinson had dealt carefully and extensively with the grave questions that must underlie any significant consideration of the problem of religious toleration. He wrote with a daring originality that was careless of doctrinal proprieties, with an incisive logic that blasted postulates that had stood firm through a thousand years of Christian history. He summoned men to consider the myths, the traditions, and the ideals of the past in terms of a complex and fragile modern world. Robinson built

¹ [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 89.

² *Ibid.*, 99.

³ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 39.

solidly: he was now prepared to rear the edifice of his plea for unlimited religious freedom upon stones of reason that had been firmly joined with the cement of historical necessity. In almost a dozen carefully written tracts, published in the early and critical years of the struggle for religious liberty in England, he brought forward every argument that the modern world has been able to advance in defence of religious liberty. His thought, diffused through many scattered pamphlets, forms in its totality one of the most important of the contributions which so many noble and courageous men of that gifted generation were making to the cause of an enlarged freedom for humanity.

Robinson sought critically to consider the problem of toleration from every angle from which attack could be launched by the orthodox. He first addressed himself to the ideal of unity which, in his opinion, lay behind every persecuting philosophy and which, it was generally believed, the proponents of religious liberty repudiated. The powerful churches, he submitted, had neglected the spiritual unity that binds them in order to found a formal uniformity that could be created and perpetuated by the simple expedient of destroying all religious groups that varied from a meaningless religious norm. Hence sect has been set against sect, church against church, and kingdom against kingdom. Bloodshed, persecution, and an irreligious bitterness have been the evil fruits of the pursuit of the impious ideal. Men have discovered that there is small difference indeed "betwixt being persecuted by an Episcopall or Presbyteriall clergy," and have been finally persuaded that neither a good society nor a vital faith can exist under conditions of intolerance. The Christian world might enjoy greater liberty and vitality if it were ruled by the tolerant Turk rather than by dominant groups that destroy Europe in the name of orthodoxy. A wholly fictitious plea of unity has been urged which is belied by the struggling, warring sects that have made Europe their battle ground. Even the Protestants dogmatize from forty different translations of the Bible, thereby perpetuating minor differences that have already become irreconcilable.¹

The unity towards which Christendom aspires can be gained

¹ [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, Pref.

only by building upon the essentials which all churches hold in common, not by an hideous effort to extirpate the variations. Spiritual censures guard the purity of the Church's doctrine, which the harsh sword of the magistrate cannot defend. Every man and every sect must be left free to find and enlarge the truth of Christ. We must ever bear in mind that this precious truth may be greatly advanced by the "stammering illiterate tongue of some otherwise despised soule."¹ Those who truly seek unity and vitality of faith will gladly grant that "all such as shall propound their thoughts touching any part of the discipline and doctrine of Gods worship and mans salvation" ought not only to be tolerated but to be encouraged, "though they seem never so strange and novel."² Those persecuting spirits should be repudiated who seek to implement God's truth "with rods and staves, cruelly destroying those who do not agree with them."³ When toleration at last comes to prevail, men will find unity in the common truth which binds them while the differences that separate them will speedily disappear as free discussion, free preaching, and free enquiry enlarge the circumference of common understanding.

The spiritual unity which the Christian world will gain from religious toleration will be further strengthened by a great, rising tide of renewed spiritual vitality. Modern Europe, Robinson pointed out, enjoyed in the printing press a unique instrument for the exploration and extension of truth. He paid the highest tribute to the services that it had already lent to the enlargement of liberty. The Reformation would hardly have been possible without its assistance, and the remarkable progress which England has made towards religious liberty has been vastly implemented by a relatively free press. The orthodox have cried out that by it errors as well as truth have been disseminated, but their frantic efforts to stifle thought betoken a poisoned and stupid mentality. "The necessity of suffering erroneous opinions to be published, lest truth thereby should be stifled, is so cleare and necessary to the eye of reason, as it is for him that hath lost any thing, to seek it where it is not, as well

¹ [Robinson], *Some few considerations*, 7.

² [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, Pref.

³ [Robinson], *Some few considerations*, 9.

as where it is, if ever he mean to finde it.”¹ Absolute liberty is necessary, not only for enlarging the known limits of truth, but for enabling those who are lost to discover their way. Once the press has been completely freed by the extension of the liberty which the Christian world requires, a new and fruitful vitality will possess all churches and all seekers after truth and eternal life.

The spiritual health which will be the immediate fruit of unlimited religious freedom will, it must be admitted, be marked by numerous heresies and a variety of opinions. But this is in itself an indication of vigorous spiritual life. Christians must enjoy liberty to search the scriptures, to examine and reject doctrines freely, and to worship God in the manner to which reason leads them.² Such earnest Christians will fall into error, but it will be an honest error which the passing of time will fully rectify. “Shall we put ourselves into such a condition, that if we be in an errour it shall be impossible for us to get out of it againe, unlesse the whole civil state, the men of war, the world doe see it as clearely as ourselves? That if as yet wee have but some degrees of truth and knowledge, it shall be impossible for us to attain to greater? That though we were in possession of the true religion, we should bee liable to have it taken from us by everie sharper civil sword than our owne?”³ This would be to reduce men to the bondage against which they have at last rebelled in England. On no plea can the toleration which they have demanded be denied. It has been demonstrated that religious freedom is necessary for the growth of true religion; the experience of history confirms as evidently that it is essential for the health and security of the civil state.⁴

A further advantage which will accrue to the Church when toleration has been gained is the tremendous strengthening of its evangelical power. It is doubtful, in fact, whether the Church has ever enjoyed its full resources of missionary strength since the days of the Apostles. For the Christian world has strayed

¹ [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 24.

² [Robinson], *Some few considerations*, 4.

³ [Robinson], *A short answer to A.S.*, 28.

⁴ [Robinson], *Moderate answer*, 39-40.

very far indeed from the simplicity and tolerance of the early Church. Imperious sects have rather alienated thinking men because they have endeavoured to force them into a dead conformity, "as though it were in their power to be converted at their pleasure, whether God would or no; or as if we were able to judge when they were wilfully ignorant, or reprobately hardned."¹ Sober reflection should convince us that papists and unbelievers can never be won until the spectre of persecution is laid at rest. Europe has been torn by fratricidal wars that have made the conversion of the New World impossible so long as Christianity is synonymous with barbaric persecution.² We should recall that the early Christians were commanded to seek out the idolaters and the lost, that Christ enjoined those Christians too weak to withstand the attractions of error rather to pray that God would take them out of the world, "then to desire that notorious sinners or misbelievers were taken out of the world in their sins."³ The Church has been so distracted, so engrossed in meaningless disputes, that it has never really undertaken the glorious obligations with which it is charged.

The unfinished responsibility for the conversion of the world cannot be assumed until the Christian churches abandon the instruments of persecution and take up the spiritual weapons with which Christ has vested them. We may be very sure that if God had intended the gospel to be advanced by the arms of force, He would not have neglected to give us specific instructions for their employment. Robinson demanded, "what . . . finde we in the Word of God which warrants us to imprison, fine, banish, or put to death any one . . . for difference of opinion in religion?"⁴ What authority, therefore, can be claimed for all the paraphernalia of coercion and persecution with which every church has frantically equipped itself?⁵ These are fatal impediments which delay the conversion of the heathen, prevent the submission of the Jews to Christ, and make impossible the recovery of those weak in faith.⁶

Robinson, in his careful *apologia* for religious freedom,

¹ [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 6-7 (pagin. irreg.).

² [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵ [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

probed deep into the Achilles' heel of the Calvinistic theory of persecution by his thoughtful analysis of the relation of the doctrine of predestination to the logic of Calvinistic thought. We have previously observed that Calvinism stood convicted of inconsistency so long as it clung to this harshly logical keystone of its dogmatic edifice while supporting at the same time the theory of enforced uniformity with such remarkable vigour.¹ Earlier thinkers had dwelt rather gingerly upon this logical inconsistency which Robinson attacked so powerfully. He charged that the Calvinists had by their own actions belied their belief in their central doctrine. It must be obvious, if we are really persuaded of the fact of election, that God's determinations cannot be thwarted. Why, he enquired, "are we so fondly jealous and preposterously careful lest the people of God should be misled and carried away with every wind of doctrine?" It is strange indeed that the orthodox require the suppression of heresies which cannot possibly pervert the elect by an authority that is even more likely to be employed for the persecution of the saints.²

Similarly, it must be granted by the Calvinists that those who have not been elected by God cannot possibly be saved despite our most rigorous coercion and our most brutal persecution. Those who persecute, therefore, deny the fundamental validity of the doctrine of predestination. Those who are truly persuaded of its truth will denounce every species of religious coercion as sheer barbarism. For such men will be convinced that "though sects and heresies should multiply never so much . . . if that one saving truth can but get liberty to shew it selfe, it will at last infalibly vanquish that many headed monster of error." They will earnestly maintain that those who take up the sword of persecution invade the "secret closet of Gods eternal predestination," destroy the conscience of the saints, and provoke wars and schisms which accomplish the ruin of saint and sinner alike. They will insist above all others, in consequence of the sublime confidence which they have in the nature of truth and in its ultimate victory, that all men of all

¹ *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, I, 242-243; II, 202-205; III, 308-309, 399-401, 403-404, 453, 465-466.

² [Robinson], *John the Baptist*, 35.

faiths should enjoy a perfect freedom for the realization of those potentialities with which God has endowed them.

Robinson had endeavoured to show that the vitality of religion and the missionary strength of the Church were dependent upon the vindication of the freedom of every human being to choose his faith in his own way. Nor is that all. So violent and aggressive have the several communions become, so haughty and inflexible have their definitions of truth grown, that the existence of an ordered civil society is menaced by intolerance. War, it must be agreed, is the worst of all the scourges that afflict mankind. Ironically enough, however, since Europe has embraced Christianity wars have mounted steadily in number and intensity. For men have been bound with fanatical zeal to the prosecution of rigidly defined systems of creed or to the defence of a particular spiritual cause. As a result "no man might adventure to call in question the lawfulness therof, or seem backward in supplying without palpable scandall and supposition of luke-warmnesse in religion."¹ The finest sentiments of the human heart have been ruthlessly exploited for the attainment of sectarian and partisan ends. When one faction seizes arms for the prosecution of the ends of faith, every other faction by the same pretended right may seek mastery. We must concede that if the Protestant religion can be truly propagated by fighting, "both Papists, Brownists and Anabaptists, even Turkes and very dogs may be brought and taught to fight for it."² Thus the world has been brought to chaos and Christ's gentle faith has been prostituted to the most evil of all human actions. "What a sad thing is this," Robinson lamented, "that a man for following his judgement . . . should not be suffered a place in the world; for if one state will not suffer him, why should another?" Religion can never be restored, nor peace regained, until mankind has won for itself the benefits of religious liberty. It is impossible that "there should be a firme secure peace throughout the world, nay not in a province, city or towne, so long as men make a point of conscience to compell one another to their opinions."³

¹ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 2.

² [Robinson], *Falshood of . . . Prynne's Truth triumphing*, Epist.

³ *Ibid.*, Pref.

By every test which the human reason can devise, then, men are entitled to and will infinitely profit from religious toleration. Moreover, the consequences of religious toleration must be faced in all candour. It assumes in essence that truth and error shall be permitted to exist, to expand, and to advance themselves under conditions of absolute equality and freedom. This bold and startling teaching the enlightened London merchant hurled into the teeth of an extremist opposition which was even then hysterically demanding the extirpation of heresy and error in England.

Though prejudice, ambition, and zeal may persuade us to embrace rigorous courses, both reason and the requirements of religion, Robinson carefully argued, leave no alternative but to extend to heresy and all variant doctrines an unconditional liberty. It is true that we are commanded by God to preach the truth. But the sanctions and the tests of truth remain intensely and inextricably subjective. Hence when men teach falsehoods under the apprehension of truth, they do no more than faithfully fulfil the commandment of God. Furthermore, as Robinson had previously demonstrated, no man may raise the hand of restraint against such false teachers. Truth and error must be permitted to contest for the loyalty of mankind upon terms of absolute equality: "this combat . . . must be fought out upon even ground, on equal terms, neither side must expect to have greater liberty of speech, writing, printing, or whatsoever else, than the other."¹

Though men of firm faith have nothing to fear and everything to gain from this liberty, the orthodox will at once raise the alarm of spiritual anarchy and confusion. But Robinson demanded of his orthodox opponents whether it was not a "far greater confusion . . . and of more dangerous consequence . . . for a thousand men and women of ten severall religions or opinions to assemble together every Sunday in a parish church for feare" than for these same persons to meet "in a peaceable manner at ten severall places according to their respective differing opinions and religion."² No Christian can possibly admit that he or his church has anything to fear from error or diversity. Men have for too long been deluded by the empty

¹ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 17.

² *Ibid.*, 17-18.

ideal of an ordered uniformity. Unhappily, however, faith does not come in the neat packages which the orthodox busily prepare for it. These inflamed spirits have sought rather a church of numbers than the "perfect men in Christ Jesus" which God requires in His Church.¹

None of the great national churches and all too few of the sects have been willing to face the supreme test of liberty and free decision. Romanism and Protestantism alike have girded themselves with an intolerance born of fear. "Let all church governments be brought to a trial," Robinson exclaimed, let us "see what the Pope can say, Episcopacie, Presbyterie, or any other that stands for compulsive jurisdiction." For though these great faiths "mince it never so finely," they fear to submit the weight and certainty of the truth which they so arrogantly proclaim to the light of reason and to the examination of the untrammelled conscience.² Yet there is not an iota of proof, Robinson contended, that all the pressure and outright persecution which have been brought to bear have at any time substantially changed the balance of faith. Thus in England, despite the frenzied efforts of the Presbyterians, despite the fact that almost everyone in London has been compelled to submit to the *Covenant*, the steady devotion of men to the faith to which reason persuades them has never wavered. "I finde," the brusque Robinson confessed, "notwithstanding . . . that the greatest part of people are little weaned from the present service booke, and wish better to Episcopacie a little reformed, I meane the rigour of it only . . . and that it should still remain diocesan, rather then Presbyteriall, or any other church government."³ Robinson was staunchly anti-Anglican, yet so ardently was he convinced of the virtue and necessity of religious liberty that he was willing to leave the trial of faith in England to the free decision of every man. He warmly maintained that whoever stood firm in his own faith, whoever believed in the ultimate invincibility of truth, could reach no other decision.

Robinson's defence of religious liberty stood complete as an impressive and systematic discussion of the manifold and per-

¹ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, 21.

² *Ibid.*, 24.

³ *Ibid.*, 27.

plexing questions that underlie the problem of dissent. It remained for him to state succinctly his own programme for England. The nation must assume, he argued, that every man stands responsible for his own faith—a faith which can be attained in no other way than by the employment of reason.¹ Therefore every man should enjoy the legal right to hold and expound that truth to which he has been persuaded. All coercion, every surviving element of persecution should be repudiated by law and suppressed by civil action. All men, Robinson wrote in his model constitution for the Bahamas, should enjoy equal rights and equal opportunities for the cultivation of their faith under the protection of law.² Every man “hath not the same place and office, nor the same measure of light,” but all men should be assisted “daily to increase in knowledge” and must be protected in the right to “walk according to what they have received, in all godliness, justice and sobriety.”³

Christ has ordained that mankind shall enjoy complete liberty for testing all things and trying all faiths. He is far more concerned with the honesty and persistency of our search than with the propriety of our opinions at any given moment. We may be sure that “such as study the variety of opinions, and trie the spirits out of a zeale to truth, choosing their religion by their owne judgements, though erronious,” are yet firmly in the way of salvation.⁴ Liberty of conscience alone ensures this vitality of faith. Such a liberty may cause some frail men to become mired in error, “yet truth being therewith permitted to be published and improved, will in all probability, not only gain so many more to God; but any one thus won to God . . . is worth thousands of those that fall from it.”⁵ We should concern ourselves, not with those who are lost, but with those

¹ [Robinson], *A short answer to A.S.*, 32.

² This interesting constitution may tentatively be ascribed to Robinson, though the evidence thus far produced for the ascription is far from conclusive. *Vide* Dr. Fulmer Mood's careful discussion of the problem of authorship in the *Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Transactions*, XXXII, 155-173.

³ [Robinson, Henry], *Broadside advertising Eleuthera and the Bahama Islands*, in *Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Transactions*, XXXII, 82.

⁴ [Robinson], *Liberty of conscience*, Pref.

⁵ [Robinson], *A short answer to A.S.*, 33.

who may gain faith if liberty is granted to all men. Christianity will then have at its disposition all of the vast resources of spiritual strength with which God has armed the tolerant Church. Then and only then will the Church regain its health and power, the state be unshackled from the ruinous engine of persecution, and the human conscience gain that dignity and integrity for which God has destined it.¹ For the attainment of these glorious ends Englishmen as they are Christians may and should require "an absolute liberty of conscience, with a toleration of all differing opinions, provided they reproach not one another, much lesse those forms which shall be chiefly countenanced by authority."² All men who lend obedience to the state, who worship quietly, and who seek God must take for themselves that freedom of spirit which is their divinely bestowed birthright.³

It may be suggested, in summary, that Robinson had presented one of the most systematic and impressive of the many defences of religious liberty that were to appear during the seventeenth century. The edifice of his thought was carefully constructed; sound argument was piled upon argument until a broad and substantial frame of thought had been reared. Robinson was above all things else a layman. He was impatient of theological niceties, contemptuous of the dogmatic vernacular which he charged had been devised to entrap simple and honest minds. He approached his problem coolly, practically,

¹ [Robinson], *A short answer to A.S.*, 34-35.

² Robinson, Henry, *Certain proposals in order to the peoples freedom and accommodation in some particulars, etc.* (L., 1652), 6; *et cf.* *Broadside advertising, etc.*, in *Col. Soc. Mass., Transacts.*, XXXII, 82.

³ Save for his attitude towards Catholicism, Robinson was unequivocal concerning the toleration of every religious opinion known to his age. He states clearly that absolutely no pressure may be exerted upon the Catholics to cause them to embrace Protestantism, but he feared to extend complete religious liberty to them because they were, in his judgment, idolaters and, more importantly, because they menaced the civil peace. But, though they should not enjoy complete religious liberty, they must at least be granted unqualified religious toleration and the right to worship quietly and privately in their own churches according to their own rites. (*Liberty of conscience*, Pref.; *Moderate answer*, 45.) When and if they disown their doctrine of rebellion they should be granted complete liberty. It need scarcely be said that very few English Protestants during this century maintained such steady tolerance in considering this most difficult and complex problem.

and sincerely. Flavouring all of his writings was that appreciation of realities so characteristic of the merchant class of his generation. His concern was ever with what could be done, with that which must be done if certain institutions and certain ideals that men treasured were to persist. Tincturing his works and occasionally exploding in wrathful paragraphs was a deep-seated distrust of the clerical mind and even, it would appear, of the integrity of clerical leadership. Robinson viewed the problems of dissent, the vital question of heresy, and the religious and institutional implications of spiritual liberty with a rare dispassion and a singular clarity of judgment. He met the fears and strictures of the orthodox squarely and, if weight of logic and reason suffice, laid them to rest. His devotion to religious liberty was complete and his perception of its full meaning almost unique in his century. Moreover, it should be emphasized, it was religious liberty, not religious toleration, for which he so eloquently pleaded. Henry Robinson must be regarded as one of the pioneers in the long and arduous search which honest and enlightened men have made for a liberty of spirit that will meet the requirements of the modern world.

3. *THE COMPASSIONATE SAMARITINE* (1644)

The lay position, so notably advanced by Robinson, was greatly strengthened in 1644 by the appearance of an anonymous and unlicensed book under the title *The compassionate Samaritine unbinding the conscience, and pouring oyle into the wounds which have been made upon the separation*. The writer indicated that he was not satisfied with the cautious position on nonconformity assumed by the Dissenting Brethren in the Assembly,¹ since they had sought to prove that Independency differed only in particulars from Presbyterianism and since they did not defend the rights of sectarian groups other than their own. The author dedicated himself to the vindication of the claims of all sectaries to religious liberty. He further stated that he was not a sectary—a statement amply sustained by the thoroughly secular tone of the book—and that his demands went far beyond mere toleration to include absolute liberty of con-

¹ *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 48–52, 368–371.

science. The writer was bitterly anti-clerical in his views and constantly emphasized that sane laymen must rescue the fragile vessel of religion from a ruthless clergy and from sects blinded by partisan zeal. The author of this interesting and stimulating tract was evidently closely associated with the amorphous lay group of which Robinson was the intellectual leader. The long and involved sentences and the sluggish style of the work suggest that William Walwyn may have been its author,¹ while the vigour of its thought and its general position on the question of toleration would suggest the pen of Richard Overton.² For the time being, however, even a tentative ascription could hardly be sustained.

The author of *The Compassionate Samaritane* accused the clergy of responsibility for the disorder, the schisms, and the persecution which were accomplishing the destruction of religion. They have sought to freeze faith into the empty forms of conformity in order to perpetuate a vested interest and to secure rich livings. They have deliberately endeavoured to "frame long methods and bodies of divinity, full of doubts and disputes, which indeed are made of purpose difficult to attaine unto, that their hearers may be alwayes learning, and never come to knowledg of truth."³ They have striven to create a special status for themselves that would make them gods rather than men. They have deliberately warped and perverted the simple and universal essentials of religion by long-winded interpretations, mysterious rendering of texts, juggling of language, and imperious assumptions which their subtle craft has devised.⁴ England will never enjoy peace nor will the Church flourish in liberty so long as these men remain masters of religion. The laymen whose stake in religion is as important as salvation itself must rise to regain control of the institutions which are the temporal frame of faith.

The secret end of every species of clerical leadership, the author alleged, is the imposition of a spiritual tyranny upon mankind. England has just risen in her might to destroy one such tyranny, but another now threatens religious freedom. For the Presbyterians have in a few brief months demonstrated

¹ *Vide post*, 180-190.

² *Vide post*, 190-196.

³ *The compassionate Samaritane*, 26,

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-33.

that they are far more dangerous enemies of tolerance than were the bishops. They are inspired by a fanaticism never evident in episcopacy and they "will be more violent, as slaves usually are when they become masters."¹ They demand control of the Church and they require the weapons of the magistrate in order to execute their intolerant designs. The Assembly has been honest, if shocking, in announcing its cruel intentions. For, like the tyrant who fitted all men to one bed by stretching or cutting off their legs, it would force men to one stature of faith and worship. It intends by its own frank admission to bind men to its formulations and to sever them from the intimate leadership of Christ.² All Christians are to be bound to a gloss on truth; all men are to be compelled to violate the clear injunction of Christ that they try all things and accept that faith to which reason and conscience persuade them.³

The orthodox in England therefore stand convicted by the words of their own mouths of a spiritual tyranny which can be called nothing else than persecution. This is true despite the fact that persecution stands condemned by every counsel of reason and divinity. Since those who persecute cannot lay claim to infallibility of knowledge, it follows that they are quite as likely to destroy truth as error.⁴ Furthermore, it is as evident that the persecutors have ever been unable to secure even the dead uniformity which they so blindly desire. Surely the Presbyterians should be given pause by the recollection that the tyranny of the bishops served only to harden dissent and to ensure the overthrow of episcopal leadership. They must know that the "conscience being subject only to reason . . . can only be convinced or persuaded thereby, force makes it runne backe, and struggle" since "it is the nature of every man to be of any judgment rather than his that forces."⁵ In addition, even if the Assembly should by chance pronounce the full truth of God, it would not in the very nature of religion be empowered to enforce that truth upon the conscience of dissent. That faith which is true and strong is weakened by no fear of error and realizes that reason alone can cure the spiritual ill of heresy.

The author attacked the Presbyterians in a vulnerable area

¹ *The compassionate Samaritane*, 17.

² *Ibid.*, 42-43.

³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11. . .

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

when he insisted that their very certainty of truth should make them completely tolerant. "I should . . . thinke," he wrote, "that they who are assured of her [i.e., truth] should desire that all mens mouthes should be opened, that so errorr may discover its foulnes, and trueth become more glorious by a victorious conquest after a fight in open field."¹ Factions that take up the temporal weapons of persecution acknowledge by that very action the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of their case, for force is ever the last desperate resort of weakness. The orthodox in England have confessed this bankruptcy of faith and stand convicted of persecution. They have sought to prop up their moral failure by an intolerant course that causes all pious men to "suspect that either they doubt their owne tenets, or know some grosse errorrs amongst themselves, which yet their interests and professions engage them to maintaine."²

England must repudiate the leadership of the orthodox clergy and solidly establish its religious constitution upon an enduring liberty for all men. The Assembly which prates so much of godly truth enjoys no patent of infallibility, is itself divided, and does not command the respect even of a majority in the nation. It should realize as well that England can be brought to a common judgment in spiritual matters only as reason and the godly life persuade men. The Assembly may draft such formularies as it pleases, but its jurisdiction is limited strictly to those who freely accept its authority.³ The orthodox must be brought to realize that every religious judgment rests upon reason and other exclusively subjective influences that an external discipline cannot affect.⁴ A complete liberty in religion must in consequence be extended to men of every persuasion. Diversity of belief will naturally ensue, but it has been proved that this provides a healthful stimulus to religion and offers no threat of harm to the civil state. Parliament, surely, has recently received warm and united support from men of many persuasions, and the Spanish can testify that the diversity of religions in Holland did not weaken the moral or physical resources of that state.⁵ It is true that the strange conduct and the absurd "revelations" of some sectaries will for

¹ *The compassionate Samaritane*, 60.

² *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

a season at least result in fantastic teachings, but tolerance will supply its own corrective since all opinions will at last be subject to the light of truth and reason.¹ Every man—and imperiousness can conjure up no exception—should be permitted to hold his judgment freely and to worship as his conscience requires so long as his actions do not endanger the safety of the state.² No church, no factious group in England can possibly take exception to this platform of liberty save the clergy, who fear that their revenues will diminish and their churches suddenly become empty once the support of a crushing tyranny has been removed from institutional religion. The spiritual faith of a nation cannot be imperilled in order to satisfy the insensate arrogance and greed of a vested interest.³

4. WILLIAM WALWYN

One of the most radical and provocative of the brilliant group of lay exponents of toleration was a London merchant, William Walwyn, who by the admission of Edwards and Prynne was the most troublesome of the numerous “gad-flies” disturbing the Assembly of Divines. This unusual man was born in Worcestershire about 1600 of good stock, his grandfather having been a bishop. Walwyn entered the Merchant Adventurers’ Company and acquired a considerable fortune in trade.⁴ He mentioned in his *Fountain of Slaunder* that he had removed to London in 1634, where, he stated rather ambiguously, he became the father of “almost twenty children.” Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War he was converted to Antinomianism and expressed the conviction that all men would in the end come to a knowledge of truth sufficient for their salvation.⁵ Hell, he wrote, was nothing more than a phantasy conjured up by the consciences of evil men. No man can reasonably argue that a merciful God would punish men through eternity for the misdeeds of a short life. A man of singular independence of judgment, Walwyn declined to subscribe to the tenets of any

¹ *The compassionate Samaritane*, 8–10.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 46–50.

⁴ Haller, William, *Tracts on liberty in the Puritan Revolution, etc.* (N.Y., 1934), I, 38.

⁵ Walwyn, William, *Walwyn’s just defence, etc.* (L., 1649), 8–9, *et passim*.

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sect, while rising to the defence of all that stood in danger of suppression. A man of considerable learning, he shows evidence of having mastered an "excellent library." He sought to study all religious teachings soberly and sympathetically and to persuade all men to the view that humanity can be saved by any faith that is honestly held. Thus, he is said to have taught that the Bible enjoys no greater proof of divine inspiration than does the Koran,¹ and he certainly boasted of having taken young people from church to church in order to demonstrate the want of charity in the most zealous professors of Christ.

Walwyn, always provocative and occasionally incendiary, was for some years involved in an irreconcilable controversy with Edwards and Prynne, the most formidable of all the Presbyterian protagonists. Edwards attacked him in the first part of *Gangraena* as a "seeker, a dangerous man," and a sceptic; in the second part of the same work as a desperate and ruthless fellow "of all religions, pleading for all; and yet what religion he is of no man can tell."² He was denounced as a defender of Paul Best,³ as a Familist, as an atheist of the blackest hue, and was imprisoned upon at least two occasions. Yet, despite the calumnies that were hurled at him, he retained an infectious humour and an even temper and replied to his opponents with a rich and subtle irony that only provoked them to a *crescendo* of vituperation.⁴ His style, while occasionally diffuse and repetitious, is marked by sobriety, thoughtfulness, and an amazing tolerance. Though hardly the most considerable, he was one of the most interesting and stimulating of the numerous lay thinkers of the age.

Most of Walwyn's many pamphlets addressed their argument

¹ Bernstein, Eduard, *Cromwell and Communism; Socialism and Democracy in the Great English Revolution* (transl. by H. J. Stenning) (L., 1930), 94.

² Edwards, Thomas, *The first and second part of Gangraena: or a catalogue and discovery of many of the errors, heresies, blasphemies and pernicious practices of the sectaries of this time, etc.* (L., 1646), II, 23, *et passim*.

³ *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 89-90, 203, for a discussion of the Best case.

⁴ Thus in his *Parable*, the doctor of Love, Justice, and Patience was summoned to operate upon Edwards for the removal of a malignant growth in his head which had been solely responsible for the amazing flow of *Gangrene* in his public utterance. Edwards, upon recovering, burst immediately into a sermon brimming over with love and charity.

to the grave danger in which religious freedom in England stood from the intolerant and persecuting designs of the Presbyterians. Certainly no writer of the revolutionary era denounced the orthodox position in more scathing periods. The Presbyterians, he held, deny to the Anglicans and Independents the right to enforce their beliefs, yet seek to arrogate precisely this power to themselves as if all truth were "centred in a Presbytery."¹ Fortunately for the safety of the nation, Parliament has freed it from the yoke of prelatical tyranny, and "very many judicious, and considerate persons" have resolved that conscience will never again become the pawn of an ambitious and coercive clergy.² The Presbyterians have met the demand for tolerance by a dangerous fanaticism which has sought to excite the persecuting spirit of the magistrate to assist in bending men to their will. They have raised the time-worn cry of heresy, have flamed up against dissent, and have proceeded upon the principle that if they cast enough dirt "some will stick, and a little . . . will suffice to blemish the cleanest and most able amongst them."³

The deeply engrained intolerance of the Presbyterians, Walwyn suggested, proceeds from their monstrous assumption that they have discovered the full limits of truth. This assumption he attacked with the cold fury of a sceptical mind. Surely Edwards and his orthodox friends should know that all points of divinity, whether essential or trivial, are in the most acrimonious dispute even amongst the learned and the orthodox. The notion that religious truth can be exactly ascertained must be denounced as a vicious fraud. Most men imbibe their religion from education, tradition, and environment and then defend their accidental views with every rationalization that fear and violence can inspire.⁴ Such men shun freshness and the stimulation of change, instantly and without examination denouncing

¹ P., W. (i.e., Walwyn, William), *The bloody proiect, or a discovery of the new designe, in the present war, etc.* (L., 1648), 7.

² Walwyn, William, *An antidote against Master Edwards his old and new poyson, etc.* (L., 1646), 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ Walwyn, William, *A still and soft voice from the Scriptures, etc.* (L., 1647), 5-7; *et vide*, *A parable, or consultation of physitisians upon Master Edwards* (L., 1646), 4.

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every variant teaching as heretical. We are, on the contrary, explicitly commanded "to try all things, the unlearned as well as the learned," and to extend to every human being the right of infinite variation of understanding and belief.¹ Men err simply because of weakness of apperception, and to revile them for this defect is to blaspheme the God who created them.

Men who are mortal and fallible have no warrant to punish others for any religious opinion. We are rather "bound in peace and love to reclaime our brother from what wee judge an error in his way; wherein the best and most knowing amongst men in our daies, may be mistaken; being all liable to take truth for error, and error for truth."² Hence if the orthodox would but contemplate the love of Christ, they would at least partially embrace all of the opinions which they have reviled under the name of heresy.³ They would see good in every sect in England and would grant to every man a complete liberty of understanding and worship. Walwyn confessed that for himself he had "no quarrel to any man, either for unbeliefe or misbeliefe, because I judge no man believeth any thing, but what he cannot choose but believe."⁴

Walwyn summoned men to the view that the tight lines of doctrinal systems must be broken down. He repeatedly asserted that our religious opinions are normally nothing more than prejudices which we defend so violently because they are not seated in the reason. When Christians strip themselves clean of the barnacles of tradition, when they face the problems of faith and morality honestly and humbly, they instantly become tolerant. For it was Walwyn's considered judgment that we can never know the full measure of truth nor determine even its broad outlines with certainty. Religion was for him an intensely personal matter, an undisciplined subjectivism, which cut across and destroyed the walls of dogma with which puny men had girded their institutional religious organization. He

¹ Walwyn, William, *A prediction of Mr. Edwards his conversion and recantation* (L., 1646), 4.

² Walwyn, William, *A whisper in the eare of Mr. Thomas Edwards. . . . Occasioned by his mentioning of him reproachfully, in his late pernicious booke, justly entituled the Gangræna* (L., 1646), 6.

³ Walwyn, *Prediction of Mr. Edwards his conversion*, 6.

⁴ Walwyn, *A still and soft voice*, 10.

consequently approached the problem of persecution and the question of heresy with a truly amazing dispassion.

All men, Walwyn submitted, hate persecution when they are persecuted. Thus England should recall the fervent denunciations by the Puritans of spiritual tyranny when they bore the yoke of intolerance. But the dazzling opportunities which dominance provides is indeed a heady wine. Every sect upon coming to power speedily seeks to perpetuate itself by destroying those who differ from it. This tendency is abundantly demonstrated by the history of Presbyterianism in England. These orthodox spirits have arrogated the name of Christian to themselves, though the true Christian "professeth himselfe, to be clearely for liberty of worship; and the greatest enemy to compulsion or restriction that can be; affirming there is no sinne so unreasonable, or un-christian, as for one man . . . to persecute, punish, or molest another for matters of religion."¹ The true Christian hates and disowns the arm of force in all matters of conscience and with good reason suspects the integrity and the intentions of all those who strive to enthrall faith. Coercive measures can have no other consequence than to harden men in heresy while filling the Church with dissemblers. Faith is so complex and so completely individualistic, our knowledge of the thought of other men so dim, that heresy, if it exists at all, cannot lie within the bounds of our jurisdiction or censure.² The writer charged that by heresy the orthodox meant "all doctrines that are not agreeable unto yours," and by schism all formal expressions of faith that swerve from the line of a fallible and presumptuous definition.³ No life can be safe, no spirit at ease, and no conscience free until we bring to bear upon what we denominate spiritual errors those spiritual remedies which Christ has appointed for their cure.

The orthodox and the zealous have made a mockery of Christ's Church and have prostituted the very essence of His teachings to their own ungodly purposes. In England particularly, the Presbyterians stand condemned of a fanatical in-

¹ Walwyn, *A parable*, 12.

² Walwyn, *A whisper in the eare of* . . . Edwards, 6-7.

³ Walwyn, William, *A word more to Mr. Thomas Edwards, minister* (L., 1646), 6; *Englands lamentable slaverie, etc.* (L., 1645), 6.

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tolerance which for a thousand years has gripped all national churches. They have laid their hands upon every persecuting weapon within their reach in the frantic effort to reduce England to their dominance. Men of good will and humble spirit can only warn them that if they are to follow Christ's way they "will feed the hungry, cloath the naked, visit the sick, relieve the prisoner, deliver the captive, and set the oppressed free, especially the oppressed for conscience sake,"—only then will they discover "error in judgement or misapprehension in worship to bee but a mote in your brothers eye, compared to a persecuting or molesting, or the reproaching beame" in their own eye.¹ They must be taught that it is dangerous and iniquitous to pass judgment upon the errors of other men. They must be brought to the realization that they betray the nation when they preach a reformation of compulsion, oblivious to the fact that the great objective of the people of England "resteth in extirpating the popish prelaticall spirit of persecution and molestation" of conscience.²

England must stand carefully upon her guard. For the spirit of persecution is insidious and tends to infect all who have seen the febrile vision of power. Thus the Independents, having gloriously vindicated liberty of conscience against the infamous designs of Calvinism, Walwyn wrote in 1649, are now themselves infected. The delusion of revelation and the feeble gropings of ignorant men have spawned many strange beliefs in England. But Independency possesses no better right to destroy them than did the Presbyterians to extirpate Independency but five brief years before. Walwyn grimly and bravely warned England against "those who cry out against community, parity and Levelling, [but who] in the mean time enforce all to their own wils both persons, estates and consciences, and if resisted, fire and sword, halters, axes and prisons, must be their executioners."³ When any clerical caste gains power, whatever its earlier pretensions may have been, it seeks mastery of all, and "then see who dares open his mouth

¹ Walwyn, *A whisper in the eare of . . .* Edwards, 9–10 (mispaged).

² *Ibid.*, 12.

³ Walwyn, William, *The fountain of slaunder discovered, etc.* (L., 1649), 4.

or move his pen."¹ It is a strange and sad commentary indeed that as sect after sect rises through suffering to power they invariably abandon the tolerance which has nurtured their strength and girded their defence.² England will know no peace, nor will the Church gain the full increment of its spiritual vitality until the laity and the state have pulled cleanly and finally the cruel fangs of clerical intolerance. England must require Parliament to preserve the liberty of Christian men and to "hate all persecuting sects with a perfect hatred."³

Walwyn had laid careful and strong foundations for the support of his defence of religious liberty. Like Robinson and the other thinkers of this group, his demand was for an unconditional freedom for every sect and eccentric opinion in the nation. Walwyn scorned to plead for a mere legal toleration. He argued briefly and brilliantly that England must consciously accept the full meaning of spiritual freedom as a necessity imposed by Christ and recommended by common decency and intelligence. If this liberty is to exist at all, it must be unexceptionable. The bonds of love have been violated by those learned and respectable men who have condemned the Baptists, the Brownists, and the Antinomians without fully understanding their teachings and spirit. Theirs are admittedly cases which truly test tolerance. Walwyn adjured his readers to "acquaint your selves with them, observe their wayes; and enquire into their doctrines . . . and so make your conclusion, or judge not of them."⁴ Intolerance has no other root than fear, and we fear that which we do not understand. But we are commanded to hold our faith fearlessly and to try all things honestly: "'tis yourselfe must doe it, you are not to trust to the authority of any man's relation," but to examine all points of view charitably and eagerly.

¹ Walwyn, *A whisper in the eare of* . . . Edwards, 13.

² Walwyn, *Fountain of slander*, 5-6.

³ Walwyn, *A whisper in the eare of* . . . Edwards, 13.

⁴ [Walwyn, William], *The power of love* (L., 1643), Epist. This tract can be attributed to Walwyn only with reservations. The style, the thought, and the candour of the document are strikingly reminiscent of his known writings. But the work is in the form of a sermon, and certain remarks (pp. 27, 20, 25) would indicate that it was delivered. If this is the case it was doubtfully by Walwyn.

The humble and tolerant Christian will see some good, some evidence of saving grace, in every opinion no matter how eccentric or apparently erroneous it may be. Men are saved rather by their disposition towards Christ than by the sterile correctness of their opinions. Hence they should be encouraged in their search for Christ and must be left free to form such tenets of faith as they will. Christians should really repose confidence in the truth which they so zealously proclaim. Surely "plaine truth will prove all, sufficient for vanquishing of the most artificiall, sophisticall error that ever was in the world; give her but due and patient audience and her persuasions" will be discovered to be invincible. Unhappily, however, Christianity has never quite dared confide its fate to those spiritual resources with which Christ has blessed it. Christendom has adopted the name and the form of Christ's faith while rejecting its spirit. It has never quite believed that salvation is free or that God's truth is simple and evident. Dogmas, formulae, and complex interpretations have been reared to form a religion which is not that which God has ordained.¹ Mankind has become ensnared in subtleties and has confused the simplest of God's ordinances. We have waged the war of Christ with "pressure of the law and affrighting terrors of wrath" while reason and love have been abandoned. We have set aside the free grace and pardon of Christ in order to impose mysterious and incomprehensible reservations upon the salvation to which all men are heirs.²

Humanity has, in brief, been reduced to a bondage which is not that of Christ. The clergy and the "politicians of the world" have sought to put the impress of their own selfish and intolerant designs upon Christ's Gospel. Persecution, furbished with pious sentiments and noble intentions, lies like a pall across the face of religion.³ Brutal and designing men have seized the Church by fomenting discord, by crying heresy, and by endeavouring "might and maine to keep at the widest distance . . . by odious tales and false imputations" those who differ in conscience.⁴ But the pious and thoughtful man may be sure that such variations will persist until they have been

¹ [Walwyn, William], *The power of love* (L., 1643), 6-8.

² *Ibid.*, 19-22.

³ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

healed by the balm of charity and nurtured into a common truth by the warm sun of free enquiry. The Christian will stand firm in the view that "such opinions as are not destructive to humane society, nor blaspheme the works of our redemption, may be peaceably endured and considered in love." All men seek truth under the possibility of error and he who endangers other seekers wars only upon himself. "Had I all the power or strength in the world at my disposing," Walwyn earnestly wrote, "I conceive I should sinne, if I should do more then in a loving way offer my argument, and gently perswade to what I conceive is both evidently true, and really usefull."¹ By these criteria which Christ has imposed, all sects in England should enjoy a perfect liberty to preach and to worship as they please. It is quite true that many of them are eccentric and that some of them are fantastic, but that fault lies at the feet of the godly. For the deluded sectaries have not enjoyed the opportunity of decency and orderliness of worship, "because they are hunted into corners, and from one corner to another, and are not free to exercise their consciences."² These men will gain in judgment, will mature in truth, and will don the cloak of respectability only when they are admitted to that birthright of freedom which Christ requires for them.

The precious benefits of religious liberty, Walwyn repeatedly emphasized, will never be gained unless the problems of religion are solved by the lay intelligence. The clergy of every sect, he somewhat unfairly alleged, are blinded by the ambition of dominion over conscience. They have, he wrote in 1645, so distorted the problem of religion that Parliament itself seems half-convinced of the case for persecution. But sober reflection will show that "Christians cannot live, though they should enjoy all naturall freedome . . . when they are not free to worship God in a way of religion" that "agreeth with their understandings and consciences." Moreover, Walwyn testified, "although I may be at liberty to worship God according to that way which the Parliament shall set up for a generall rule to the whole nation; yet if I were not perswaded that I might lawfully submit thereunto, all the torments in the world should not

¹ Walwyn, *A whisper in the eare of* . . . Edwards, 7 (mispaged).

² [Walwyn], *Power of love*, 44.

enforce mee.”¹ This is a conviction which England has tested and refined in the flames of civil war. The sectaries, as well as laymen grimly devoted to liberty, have aided Parliament in overwhelming one spiritual tyranny and they will insist that some settlement shall be concluded that will protect the consciences of all men. They will require that “every one ought to be fully perswaded in his owne minde of the lawfullnesse of the way wherein he serveth God.”² They will rise up to deal effectively with those who forget that when the pious and resolved man is denied “his liberty of worshipping God according to his conscience, his life in an instant becomes burthensome to him, his other contentments are of no esteeme, and you bring his gray hairs with extreame sorrow to the grave: for of all liberty liberty of conscience is the greatest: and where that is not: a true Christian findeth none.”³

Parliament, Walwyn emphasized, enjoys absolute sovereignty in civil matters, but its power cannot invade religious sovereignty, which is lodged in the individual man. History has repeatedly demonstrated that it is destructive for the civil magistrate to meddle in religion or to restrain men in matters of faith.⁴ Every man must be respected and every conscience must remain inviolable. These inherent rights Parliament must ensure by preserving Englishmen in their liberties, “not only as we are men, but (Christians namely, in a liberty to be fully perswaded in our own minds, in all things appertaining to God’s worship) and protect us in the peaceable practice of our consciences, against all kinds of molestation.”⁵ Parliament may, if it so desires, authorize the establishment of a church which shall embrace the nation, so long as this church is not sustained by the pillars of coercion. At the same time, however, it must guarantee by law and preserve by its civil sword the right of all men to dissent, to worship freely, and to cultivate in peace and security the tender vine of their own faith.⁶ When this has

¹ [Walwyn, William], *A helpe to the right understanding of a discourse concerning Independency* (L., 1645), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ Walwyn, *A word more to Mr. Thomas Edwards*, 5.

⁴ Walwyn, *Bloody proiect*, 13.

⁵ Walwyn, *A word more to Mr. Thomas Edwards*, 5.

⁶ [Walwyn], *A helpe to the right understanding*, 7; *Bloody proiect*, 13.

at last been accomplished England will face the future with hope and tranquillity. For in that nation in which religious liberty lies at the basis of the constitution, "all things flourish, for thither will resort all sorts of ingenious free borne minds; such commonwealths abound with all things either necessary or delightfull . . . such a government aboundeth with wise men, and with the general affections of the people," who esteem nothing too precious to spend in defence thereof.¹

5. RICHARD OVERTON

Walwyn fought in the front lines of the hosts which, under the loosely but adroitly imposed leadership of secular minds in Parliament, in the army, and in the capital, waged relentless war in behalf of religious liberty. Walwyn was one of an advanced and radical group of rationally minded and intensely secular spirits that was opening up new vistas of religious and political thinking. Certainly the most radical and probably the most incendiary of this group was Richard Overton,² a professed

¹ [Walwyn], *A helpe to the right understanding*, 7.

² Overton probably spent his early life in Holland, where he maintained intimate contacts during his entire career. He first came into public attention as a result of his bitter attacks upon the persons of the bishops and the institution of episcopacy. His *Mans Mortallitie* apparently had some influence since a small sect adopted the views set forth in the work. (P[agitt], E[phraim], *Heresiography: or, a description of the heretickes and sectaries of these latter times* [L., 1645, 1662], 231.) Parliament appointed a committee to investigate the book, but no action was apparently taken against the author at this time. Overton had as early as 1643 moved to a vigorous denunciation of Presbyterian intolerance. He was imprisoned in 1646 because of his warm espousal of the cause of John Lilburne, but was released after the army radicals intervened in his behalf. Overton was associated with Lilburne in the defence of the *Agreement of the People* (Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 106-107, 120-130), and was later to become intimately involved in the Leveller Movement (*S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, 1649-1650, pp. 57-58, 59). He was obliged to flee abroad where he conspired with royalist agents against the Protectorate. (*Calendar of the Clarendon State Papers preserved in the Bodleian Library* [ed. by C. Ogle, W. H. Bliss, W. D. Macray] [Oxford, 1869-1876], III, §153.) Returning to England he was again imprisoned, not being released until January, 1660. He attacked the Restoration government with his accustomed energy and was once more committed to prison in 1663. (*S.P. Dom., Charles II*, 1663-1664, pp. 311, 461.) A vigorous, fearless, and refreshing thinker, Overton must none the less be regarded as an incendiary who could probably never have lived happily in any ordered society.

materialist, a consummate pamphleteer, a dangerous man in attack, and an almost violent proponent of religious liberty.

Overton published over his own initials in 1643 a treatise entitled *Mans Mortallitie* that was one of the first frankly materialistic works of the century. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a more reasoned materialistic argument in any age. Overton addressed himself to the task of reducing religion to a rationalistic basis, though it seems rather that what he did was to deny the basis of all revealed religion. Men, the rationalist suggested, have long talked glibly about the soul without ever taking the trouble to define or describe it.¹ The soul "is elementall and so finite"; it is a phantasy, an expression of the body, that cannot exist independently of the body.² Even the Bible seems to lend support to the opinion that it perishes with the body.³ The faculties of the human organism begin with nothing at birth, flourish with maturity, decline with age, and are extinguished with death. All that is created is material, and that which is not material is nothing.⁴ What men call their souls is a collection of mental faculties which all animals have to a lesser degree than mankind. Hence if man is possessed of an immortal soul, animals likewise must enjoy some kind of immortality.⁵ Such a position is obviously absurd. It follows, therefore, from all visible evidence that man's soul is identical with his body and that neither survives death.

Overton evidently felt that men had in their fear and longing erected many fictions which could not bear reasonable scrutiny. Thus he would regard the existence of hell and the belief in future punishment as a sheer invention of conscience which enables us to classify moral actions as good or evil. Man has shown an inventive genius, however, which has finally divorced his thinking from reality. He has surrounded even his own birth with a divine aura, though he obviously brings forth children precisely as the animals bear their young.⁶ Man's

¹ O[verton], R[ichard], *Mans mortallitie or a treatise wherein 't is proved, both theologically and philosophically, that whole man . . . is a compound wholly mortall, etc.* ([L.], 1643), 11.

² Overton, *Mans mortallitie*, 12-15.

³ He quotes several biblical texts, especially *Ecclesiastes* iii, 19.

⁴ Overton, *Mans mortallitie* (second ed., 1644), 10.

⁵ *Ibid.* (1643 ed.), 18-19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41, 46.

foundation is wholly in the dust from which he issues and to which he returns. Overton holds out only one hope, or rather the reader suspects one gesture to orthodoxy—although man has, so far as his own observation and reason extend, no hope of immortality, he may attain by some means not apparent to reason a mystical merging with Christ in an after-life. But even of this the writer evidently stood in doubt.¹

This argument represents an espousal of a scepticism in matters of religion which was implicit, though more carefully concealed, in the thought of many of the laymen of his age. Religious persecution was to a mind sceptical of the very bases of Christianity barbarous and without possible defence. Such a thinker may employ the terminology and the arguments advanced by those religious men who require spiritual liberty as an article of their faith, or who demand it from philosophical conviction, but his essential position remains wholly dissimilar and his reasoning is advanced from quite unrelated premises. So intense and critical was the struggle that was waged between the years 1642 and 1649 against the threat of Presbyterian mastery in England that men of all persuasions were welded under the leadership of Independency into a strong and effective weapon directed towards the sole objective of gaining religious freedom.² Overton and his friends fought in the vanguard of this coalition, but the iron of their scepticism and the hard texture of their rationalism sharply differentiates them from their Congregational allies.

In 1646 Overton focused his attack upon Parliament, which in his opinion should have concerned itself with the legal protection of every conscience in the nation. Instead, it has permitted the sirens of the Assembly to assume responsibility for organized religion in England. Under unscrupulous clerical guidance it has sought to determine matters of dogma and discipline, "approving this, and reproaching that" in perfect conformity with the traditions of popish parliaments before it. The Presbyterians have been protected and advanced and, as if

¹ Overton, *Mans mortallitie* (1643 ed.), 57.

² Independency has been defined in this work with strict reference to the amorphous alliance of convenience which dissolved directly the threat of Presbyterian tyranny had been dispelled in England. *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 49-50, 130, 252, 347-353, 435-438, 450-451.

to appease their shrill demands, they, a fanatical minority sect, have been given those weapons with which a spiritual dominion may be gained.¹

England, the London radical insisted, is engaged in a civil war dedicated to the attainment of both civil and religious liberty. But in her intense prosecution of the first objective she stands in grave danger of losing the second because of the treason of the Presbyterians. The Presbyterians have as the price of an indifferent political loyalty demanded a tyrannous control of the faith of the nation. They have sought to enslave the English people to a peculiar definition of the Church and to bind "both of Parliament and people unto . . . Presbyterian dictates, in all matters evangelicall and spirituall; which is no other, but the very spirit, marrow, root, and quintecense of popery."² The spiritual tyranny to which they aspire is quite as dangerous as the political tyranny which has been destroyed. They have endeavoured to override and overawe every dissentient group. They have displayed a "murthering, bloody disposition" which bears no relation to Christianity and which should warn Parliament and the army that this danger, too, should be cut down.³ For all too soon those who now rest in liberty may "have their persons banish'd or imprisoned, their goods plundered and confiscate, their houses pull'd downe, and gibbets made of the timber to hang their tender consciences out, to take the Presbyterian ayre."⁴ Presbyterianism stands convicted of the intention to persecute by the frantic admission of its own proponents and by the despotic formulations of its assembly at Westminster.

The nation must accordingly consider most carefully the social and religious significance of the persecution with which the orthodox intend to enthrall it. It should reflect that any state or church armed with persecution stands in grievous and mortal danger. For the cruel shaft of persecution touches men

¹ [Overton, Richard], *A remonstrance of many thousand citizens, and other free-born people of England, to their owne House of Commons, etc.* (L., 1646), 12.

² [Overton, Richard], *Divine observations upon the London-ministers letter against toleration, etc.* (n.pl., 1646), 5.

³ Overton, Richard, *An arrow against all tyrants and tyranny, etc.* (L., 1646), pagin. irreg.

⁴ [Overton], *Divine observations*, 6.

in conscience, which they will rise to defend with a fury born of desperation.¹ An enthroned orthodoxy seeks by all the agencies at its command to halt the age-long search for truth and to stifle spiritual vitality in the sinuous coils of an infallible definition of faith. The persecuting spirit seeks to restrain all men to that limit of knowledge possessed by those who wield authority and to prevent any Christian from attaining a spiritual stature greater than its own.² Its bride is fear and its issue spiritual death. It contradicts the very meaning of religion and makes a hollow mockery of Christ's teachings. The persecution contemplated by the orthodox, Overton hotly charged, was worse than the ravishing of the "bodies of women and maides against their wills; Yea, it is beyond the Turkish cruelty, for though the Turkes force the bodies of Christians and strangers to slavery, yet they let their conscience goe free." But these inflamed spirits of orthodoxy have as their steady design the invasion of the conscience of their friends and neighbours, the spoliation of their estates, and the enslavement of their spirits.³ These men of rigid faith are the dangerous incendiaries who betray the Church and engulf the state in ruin. They make men "to stand in defiance and defence one against the other, even to the drawing of the sword, especially when one thinks he can conquer the other, which makes them lie in wait for blood."⁴

Overton expressed the fervent prayer that England possessed sufficient sanity to see that religious toleration offered the only hope both for the vitality of religious life and for the prosperity of the state. He shrewdly pointed out that there was no semblance of spiritual unity in the nation and that uniformity could not in any circumstance be attained by means of coercion. If the Presbyterian demands were granted, it would have no other effect than the elevation of one sect amongst many to a pre-

¹ [Overton], *Divine observations*, 10.

² [Overton, Richard], *The arraignment of Mr. Persecution presented to the House of Commons, and to all the common people of England, etc.* (L., 1645), 24. This is one of the most lively and interesting pamphlets written in the period of the Civil Wars. Though there has been some disagreement concerning the authorship, largely because of Prynne's attribution of it to Henry Robinson, the preponderance of opinion would now suggest that Overton was probably the author.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴ [Overton], *Divine observations*, 12.

carious power which it would endeavour to defend by every cruel means that desperation could contrive.¹ Surely, Overton pleaded, England will realize that no sect and no temporal authority "can have any power at all to conclude the people in matters that concerne the worship of God, for therein every one of us ought to be fully assured in our owne mindes, and to be sure to worship him according to our consciences." Parliament may, it is true, lend its approval and encouragement to a particular church, but that church enjoys no prescriptive right to the loyalty of Englishmen until it has secured it by persuasion and sound preaching. This basic condition of both religion and peace Parliament should ensure by extending to every man the legal right to think and worship precisely as his conscience shall require.²

Parliament must see clearly and act with judicious despatch in this grave problem of religion. Above all else, it must not be ensnared by the pious pretensions of the orthodox. It must base its religious policy upon the solid conviction that persecution is iniquitous and destructive, whether it be perpetrated in the interests of Catholicism or of Protestantism. It must deliberately pull the fangs of intolerance from all religion to the end that "no religion have power over other, that all in the generall have toleration, and none in particular be offensive."³ It should guarantee to the Catholic the right to be Catholic and to the Protestant the right to be Protestant until such time as reason has accomplished a conversion which naked force cannot effect. It must interpose the cold steel of its power in the ceaseless and ruinous war of faith in order to quiet the clash of sects, to still the fury of an arrogant and dangerous clergy, and to compel men of faith to wage their war with the weapons of spiritual strife. Then and only then will the state be safe and the conscience free. Then and only then may Protestant and Catholic live in peace with one another, and will the cruel lash of persecution be stayed from the back of faith. This is the liberty of conscience towards which England has set her face, towards the attainment of which brave and resolute men have poured out their blood upon a score of fields. Parliament

¹ [Overton], *Divine observations*, 13.

² [Overton], *A remonstrance*, 13.

³ [Overton], *Arraignment of Mr. Persecution*, 29.

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND
cannot, it dare not, betray the aspirations of a nation that has
seen the vision of freedom.

6. GERARD WINSTANLEY, 1609-?

Strange and disruptive forces had been loosed in England by the straining ebb and flow of civil war. We are not directly interested in the erratic radicalism which so gravely disturbed the conservative revolutionaries charged with the government of the Commonwealth, save as these forces lent their weight to the development of religious toleration. Gerard Winstanley, the intellectual leader of a primitive communistic group calling themselves the Diggers, deserves special attention for the beauty of his expression and for the compelling lucidity of his plea for a pure religious liberty.¹ However confused and chaotic Winstanley's social and economic heresies may have been, his writings on the problems of religion compel our admiration. The strange conduct and the stranger demands of the Diggers were first brought to the attention of the government in April, 1649, and the Council of State took immediate steps to put an end to the experiment at St. George's Hill.² Winstanley was not silenced, however, and his most important work, appearing in that year, bears no trace of disillusionment or resentment and, for that matter, remarkably little concern with social and economic problems as such. Gifted with a clear and warm style, endowed with a fertile and enquiring mind, Winstanley approached the problem of toleration through the medium of pure reason.

Winstanley held that no man can ever know truth fully, that the formulations of the learned and of the orthodox are worth-

¹ Winstanley was born at Wigan, probably in 1609 (Berens, L. H., *The Digger Movement in the Days of the Commonwealth*, etc. [L., 1906], 41). From scattered references in his writings it would appear that he settled in London as a small trader and apparently became in time a freeman of that city. After having suffered severe reverses in business during the War, he retired to the country to meditate upon the grievances, real and imaginary, of the poor. In 1649 he led a small group of followers to occupy wasteland at St. George's Hill (Surrey) in the feckless adventure which is usually associated with his name. Most of his writings, which have been too much neglected, date from this period.

² *The Clarke Papers*, etc. (ed. by C. H. Firth) (L., 1891-1901), II, 209-212.

less, and that every human being, using his own resources in his own way, must proceed unassisted in the search for knowledge. We must confine our statements concerning truth to that which we know and can demonstrate. "Every one who speaks of any herb, plant, art, or nature of mankind, is required to speak nothing by imagination, but what he hath found out by his own industry and observation in tryal."¹ We discover the law of God not by mystical contemplation, not from the hands of authority, but by observation and study of the laws of nature. Man's knowledge of God is therefore strictly limited by his observation of the physical phenomena of the universe. Nor do we dare go beyond the sphere of our own data in contemplation of the mysteries and miracles upon which men place their hope in religion. Therefore to know what God "will be to a man, after the man is dead, if any otherwise, then to scatter him into his essences of fire, water, earth, and air, of which he is compounded, is a knowledge beyond the . . . capacity of man to attain to while he lives in his compounded body."² Most persecution and intolerance, Winstanley evidently believed, proceeds from man's frightened yet desperate effort to create reality where reality does not exist. When man seeks to explain the mysteries of the spiritual world, he "builds castles in the air, or tells us of a world beyond the moon, and beyond the sun, meerly to blinde the reason of man."³ It must be firmly insisted that man possesses no valid and demonstrable understanding of God beyond the knowledge which the created world unfolds. We must decline to submit our judgments to others, or to entrust our mind and soul to any authority other than that of our own experience.

The lofty and almost frigid scepticism of Winstanley's mind regarded any species of mental coercion as an unspeakable invasion of the human reason—persecution as a bestial survival of savagery. The reason stands inviolable, subject only to the persuasion and tuition of the natural world which lies about us. Only the data of natural reason form a safe and sure guide in religion and philosophy. Even the Bible, Winstanley argued, is

¹ Winstanley, Gerard, *The law of freedom in a platform: or, True magistracy restored, etc.* (L., 1652), 57.

² *Ibid.*, 58.

³ *Ibid.*, 59.

a dead book unless it be illumined by a rational spirit. There are many translations and innumerable conflicting renderings, so that even the learned disagree concerning which is the true one. Mankind is pressed to lend blind obedience to a text of most uncertain validity. "How," he demanded, "can these Scriptures be called the everlasting gospel, seeing it is torne in peeces daily . . . by various translations, inferences and conclusions; one pressing this, another that," while mankind wanders lost and deluded?¹ The clergy have sought to turn the living message and the personal gospel of Christ into a deadly and crushing law which they employ to enslave the conscience and reason of humanity.

Men are lost, then, in a wilderness of speculation, conflict, and persecution from which they can issue only by the honest and fearless exercise of the individual reason. And our reason is omniscient since God is Himself the Spirit of Reason.² Hence when man is governed by reason alone he is bound to God by an indissoluble tie. For God has by pure reason knit "the whole creation into a one-nesse of life and moderation." Since reason is man's supreme and divine attribute, he defiles himself and betrays God when he submits to any other persuasion, whether it be external or internal. Our innate reason must guide and rule us, binding us with ties to God who may Himself be called the totality of reason. When we anchor our lives and orient our intellects firmly upon the basis of reason we may then move certainly into the knowledge of truth. For we may be sure that all truth lies in "the secrets of nature and creation . . . and the light in man must arise to search it out."³ We have perceived the face of truth but dimly because our eyes have been bound by a cruel and frightened authority bent only upon perpetuating its fallible and selfish gloss upon truth. This bondage must be thrown off and every man who has even the desire to speak must be heard patiently and thankfully.

Those who would secure the emancipation of reason and open up the flood-gates of truth must as the first condition of

¹ Winstanley, Gerard, *Truth lifting up its head above scandals, etc.* (L., 1649), Pref.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

³ Winstanley, *Law of freedom*, 56-57.

their enfranchisement destroy the clerical tyranny which has enslaved them. In particular, mankind must throw off the tyranny of the Bible which the clergy have used as a key to lock the door of reason. The Bible, Winstanley submitted, is nothing more than the testimony of a few men concerning God. It is a guide, not a law unto us. If it were otherwise, it would be to compel men "to walke by the eyes of other men, and the spirit [reason] is not so scanty, that a dozen or so pair of eyes shall serve the whole world" since "the same spirit that fils one, fils all."¹ No man can speak positively concerning God until he has known Him and even then the truth to which he testifies enjoys no more than personal validity, useful but not binding upon other men. The Bible consequently must be regarded as a record of pure experience, helpful to us, enjoining us to patience and tolerance, and confirming man in his devotion to the sovereignty of reason. When this emancipation has been effected, reason will stand supreme and unchallenged. We will then detect that reason is synonymous with God. Man will realize that it is his priceless endowment and that hence "he need not run after others to tell him or teach him" those truths which he may and must discover for himself. We will attain identity with God, wherein our salvation lies, directly we surrender our lives to the sovereign control of reason. Therefore, Winstanley earnestly pleaded, "deceive not yourselves, but let reason work within you; and examine and see what your flesh is subject to; for whatever doth govern in you that is your god."²

Certainly the seventeenth century produced no more thorough-going rationalism than that which dominated the thought of this brilliant man. Winstanley attacked the very bases of institutional and revealed religion in order to clear room for the absolute sovereignty of the human mind in every sphere of its observation and interest. There proceeded naturally and directly from this position a pure theory of toleration whose roots were embedded not in religion but in the soil of rational persuasion. His thought was likewise tintured by a

¹ Winstanley, *Truth lifting up its head*, 39.

² Winstanley, *The saints paradise: or, the father teaching the only satisfaction to waiting souls, etc.* (L., [1658]).

profound, indeed by a complete, distrust of the clergy and of what has well been called the organized manifestations of faith.

The so called systems of divinity, the rigidly held and imposed constitutions of all organized churches are, so Winstanley alleged, a mass of imaginations, lies, and deceptions. Divinity is concerned with the interpretation of other men's words and with the study of fallible human knowledge.¹ It strives blindly to propound infallible judgments upon questions beyond the scope of reason and to probe into mysteries which, since they are extra-rational, are either the fabrications of unbalanced minds or unimportant. It seeks, in brief, to lend substance to the insubstantial. The clergy have enslaved men by an absurd yet cruel arrogance. Thus if any man suggests to a divine that "there is no reason for what you say," he invariably answers with an elaborate flight from reason. He presumptuously replies that "you must not judge of heavenly and spiritual things by reason, but you must believe what is told you, whether it" be reasonable or no. This moral and intellectual position Winstanley bluntly condemned as a lie and a fraud. It enjoins man to stretch himself to a stature which he can never attain; it searches with desperate energy for phantasies which have no existence. It violates reason and makes of religion a myth and a destructive delusion. Winstanley charged in carefully measured periods that "they who preach this . . . doctrine are the murderers of many a poor heart, who is bashful and simple, and that cannot speak for himself, but that keeps his thoughts to himself."² Intolerance is the lash which the churches have used to drive mankind along the ruinous road of persecution; it is the clever and diabolical means which the clergy have employed to cause men to gaze upon the airy mystery of heaven while they steal the solid earth from under their feet.³

The sovereign evil, then, which lays waste the human conscience, which degrades the nature of religion, and which seeks to enslave the divine endowment of reason is the terrible scourge of persecution. Even the majesty and functions of the civil state have been invaded by a desperate clerical caste intent only on securing their own selfish dominance. The world

¹ Winstanley, *Law of freedom*, 60.

² *Ibid.*, 61.

³ *Ibid.*, 62.

has all but been destroyed, and religion has been made a mockery by the warring clash of predatory sects bent only upon maintaining an usurped and evil ecclesiastical power. The blight of persecution has withered the arm even of the secular magistrate. "O that our magistrates would let church work alone to Christ," Winstanley exclaimed, "upon whose shoulders they shall find the government lies, and not on theirs. And then, in the wisdom and strength of Christ, they would govern commonwealths in justice, love and righteousness more peaceably." This is the peace which human society is entitled to require; this is the freedom which reason and religion demand. But a blundering magistrate still duped by a ruthless clergy has not yet, even in England, freed men to the enjoyment of the divine prerogatives which are theirs. For the clergy still oppress reasonable men and bind religion to the cross of dogma. Those bold spirits who dare question the judgment of the clergy are still "cashiered, imprisoned, crushed, and undone, and made sinners for a word, as they were in the popes and bishops days." The name of persecution has been banished from the society of civilized men, but the fact, thinly disguised, remains with us.

Winstanley's theory of pure toleration is implicit in every page of his writings. His intellectual and religious thought was dominated by the conviction that the human reason was sovereign and that truth could be found only in the quiet and undisturbed contemplation of the world that lies around man. Hence both his religious thought and his social teachings were predicated upon the impulse to withdraw from society, which is mastered by brutal and irrational force, in order to apprehend truth in its subjective certainty. Even his communistic inclinations, we are persuaded, were derived rather from an essentially monastic instinct of withdrawal than from any revolutionary or evangelical persuasion.¹ So intense was his devotion to reason, so suspicious was he of the manifold and confused objectives of a selfish and perverted authority, that he desired to strip his

¹ In his letter to Fairfax and the Council (dated December 8, 1649) Winstanley stresses the argument that the poor must be permitted quietly to gain a living from the land. He emphasizes the fact that the Diggers have been severely and unjustly treated, and expresses the hope that they may be permitted to live in peace and quietness. (*Clarke Papers*, II, 218-221.)

mind free of the traditions and *mores* which encumber the not wholly emancipated man. Hence his devotion to tolerance and his hatred of all species of coercion burned with an almost fanatical intensity that lighted realms of freedom as yet quite unexplored.

Man can attain the fulness of his moral and rational stature only under conditions of absolute freedom, Winstanley fervently insisted. To compel men in any religious cause can be regarded as nothing else than "a treason against the spirit," for in the Kingdom of God every human being is invested with a complete liberty. Every man must learn of God by the tuition of his reason and by the cumulative data of his experience. The civil ruler, if he will not destroy the warrant of his authority, must assist men in this slow but noble search for truth. Towards this end he must "suffer every one that will quietly to keepe the record in their houses, or to rerd [read] it, or speak of it one to another," to search for truth in any private corner which the Christian desires to explore.¹ The liberty which reason and religion require is unexceptionable; it may not be invaded on pious pretext or on the facile plea of order. For there is no other way by which man may gain identity with God than by the untrammelled search of an enquiring mind.

7. JOHN MILTON, 1608-1674

Milton's thought when considered as a corpus presents perplexing difficulties to the historian. An intellectual colossus whose thought was ever organic, a mighty spirit that could thunder with wrath or persuade with a velvet logic, a tempestuous and errant mind that never found a safe and sheltered mooring, Milton's restless intellect roamed across the face of all knowledge. The historian delights in thought and persuasions that are fixed, that lend themselves to easy classification and analysis. He is all too disposed to accuse of inconsistency the mind that moulds itself gradually. His orderly habits of thought are disturbed by the spirit that possesses sufficient flexibility to renounce without violating its own integrity an intellectual position earlier held. Milton's thought, at least in the area of

¹ Winstanley, *Truth lifting up its head*, 46-47, 71.

religion, matured slowly through successive stages to find peace in the end in an intense spiritual individualism, anarchistic in its implications, anti-clerical in its manifestations, and only vaguely Christian in its dogmatic content.

We may safely say that when the full body of Milton's thought is considered his contribution to the theory and development of religious toleration is seen to be much slighter than has been supposed. All that he wrote in its defence had known earlier, more systematic, and more reasoned elucidation. His consideration of every phase of the complex problem of religious liberty was couched in a subjective intensity which robs the argument of its force and which so reflects the stress of personal conflict that the broader and more catholic limits of the issue are either ignored or only dimly sketched. His reasoning moves with a weight and majesty born of great art, but its sweep is limited and its ambit restricted by the passion or persuasion of the moment. Save in beautiful and moving periods in *Paradise Lost* his mind was never sufficiently detached, his temper never sufficiently disciplined, and his view never sufficiently enlarged to bring to bear the full power of his titanic mind on those problems which so harassed the England of his age.

The reservations which must be imposed upon Milton's contribution to religious toleration are further emphasized when we consider even superficially the four major periods of the man's spiritual development. In the earliest period, ending in 1644, his perspective was foreshortened, his judgment ill-balanced, and his temper badly frayed by a violent and uncharitable attack upon episcopacy. In fact it may be argued that so furious was his hatred of the bishops that he, like so many Puritans during these years, fell into the outstretched and tightening arms of the presbyters. Recovering his poise and beginning to suspect that a Calvinistic tyranny differed only in name from a Laudian repression, Milton published the *Areopagitica* in 1644. Brilliant, tense, and heroic as it was it must at the same time be stressed that the scope of this moving and dramatic plea was limited, that it was not well reasoned, and that it ignored the full sweep of the burning issues which were being fought out in Parliament, in the Assembly, and in a

hundred score of pamphlets. There followed fifteen years of brooding and inexplicable silence during a period surely the most critical in all of English history for religious liberty. The weight of his renown, the magnificent rhetoric of his prose, and the distilled wisdom of his verse would have served well heroic men who were in these years struggling to procure and then to preserve religious freedom. This strange silence was broken in 1659 by a steady stream of works which give mature and reasonably systematic defence to the theory of toleration. But, unhappily, by that date the theory of toleration stood a completed edifice while the possibility of its immediate application in the life of the nation had been temporarily eclipsed.

a. Early thought, 1640-1643: the period of attack

The youthful Milton, the Milton who penned *Il Penseroso*, exhibited those qualities of mind and spirit that characterized the great moderate party of which Chillingworth, Falkland, and Hales were the dominating personalities. His nature was deeply spiritual and his moral inclination Puritan, while his traditional instincts inclined him towards the acceptance of a broad and tolerant Anglicanism. It was the peculiar tragedy of the fourth decade of the seventeenth century that so many youthful minds, disposed by a humanistic training and a catholic quality of thought to a broad and moderate outlook, were embittered and then engulfed by the mounting crisis in politics and religion. John Milton was peculiarly a victim of this tragedy. The sharpening anger of strife, the centrifugal forces which in critical periods of human history whirl most men into the rigid discipline of parties, caught him up with a velocity that his as yet immature devotion to the philosophy of moderation could not withstand.

The fact that the dreams and hopes of his youth had been outraged, the fact that he was aligned in a conflict which required a devotion and a discipline that dissipated his humanism, together with the initial contagion and enthusiasm with which Puritanism dedicated itself to the extirpation of past evils, account, it may be, for the fanaticism and the intemperance of Milton's polemics against Anglicanism during the

years 1640-1643.¹ The very violence of his attack, the psychologist would probably suggest, betrays the essential uncertainty of his intellectual position. With shrill vituperation he demanded the eradication of prelacy in England and with a naïve enthusiasm urged that once this had been accomplished a profound spiritual reformation would stir the land.² This reformation, he insisted in his *Reason of Church Government*, must be instantly accomplished; "neither fear of sects, no, nor rebellion, can be a fit plea to stay reformation, but rather to push it forward with all possible diligence and speed." But there is little evidence to show that Milton reflected seriously on the profoundly disruptive consequences that accompany the destruction of institutions delicately intertwined with the fabric of human society. He gives us no cause to believe that he had pondered carefully and patiently the possibility of the compromise with the past which Hall, certainly the most courageous and liberal of the bishops, was calmly urging in the midst of personal peril and institutional collapse;³ there is certainly no proof that Milton had considered with even reasonable prudence the intellectual content of Presbyterianism or that he had reflected upon the implications underlying its demand for dominance in England. In this period, as Saurat has suggested, he was dominated by the passion for liberty,⁴ but it should be added that the very violence and naïveté of his passion delivered him into the arms of a party that offered greater danger to religious freedom than had the prelacy which Milton so eloquently and vehemently denounced.

The force of Milton's attack during these early years of the Revolution—an attack, it must be repeated, which was levelled against the moderate Anglicans—was directed against the rigidity and intolerance of the Establishment. Indeed by a simple substitution of proper names his tracts duplicate in

¹ Innumerable instances of downright scurrility could be cited. *Vide* Milton, John, *Animadversions upon the Remonstrants defence against Smectymnius* (L., 1641), in *Works of John Milton, in verse and prose* (L., 1863), I, 241, for an example.

² Tillyard, E. M. W., *Milton* (L., 1930), 120-121.

³ *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 146-154, for a discussion of Hall's thought.

⁴ Saurat, Denis, *Milton: Man and Thinker* (N.Y., 1925), 47.

argument and often in citation precisely the content of arguments which were in these same years being launched by more observing men against the presbyters. Basically, Milton charged that prelacy was an extraneous growth upon the body of Christianity, founded and nurtured by bigots who desired to circumscribe the freedom with which men have been endowed by the gospel. It had its origin "when men began to have itching eares, then not contented with the plentifull and wholsom fountaines of the gossell, they began after their owne lusts" to arrogate to themselves a binding authority over the Church and faith.¹ These men have stood stubbornly immovable against the tide of reformation in England, have conspired to halt it lest it inundate their selfish prerogatives.² These prelates, Milton hotly alleged, are but a "tyrannicall crew and corporation of imposters, that have blinded and abus'd the world so long."³ Having wrenched the scriptures, having exhausted tradition, they have in desperation entrusted their defence to the most moderate of their own party in a frantic effort to hide their nakedness.⁴ These men have been stripped of reasonable defence and can do no more than "plunge, and tumble, and thinke to ly hid in the foul weeds, and muddy waters, where no plummet can reach the bottome."⁵ When attacked for present sins they can evidence no better defence than the antiquity of those sins and the fact that reasonable and moderate men have in the past condoned them.

Having failed to substantiate its spiritual claims, episcopacy has sought to establish itself as a pillar of society on the plea that it is essential for the preservation of a decent social structure and of orderly government. This, Milton alleged, is a dangerous lie. It is the device by which religion has been prostituted and a secular slavery imposed.⁶ No reasonable or

¹ [Milton, John], *Of prelatieall episcopacy, etc.* (L., 1641), in *Works*, I, 73.

² Milton, John, *Of reformation touching church discipline in England, and the causes that hitherto have hindered it* (L., 1641), in *Works*, I, 3-10.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, I, 11.

⁴ This was Milton's evasive reply to the solid moderation of men like Hooker, Ussher, Hall, and Andrewes. But at least Hall drove him from vindictive abuse to an examination of the reasonable grounds of church government. (Cf. Masson's more favourable judgment: Masson, David, *The Life of John Milton, etc.* (L., 1871-1894), II, 363.)

⁵ Milton, *Of reformation*, *Works*, I, 32.

⁶ *Ibid.*, *Works*, I, 38-39.

scriptural grounds can be advanced to sustain the prelatical contention.¹ In the name of discipline Anglicanism has fabricated the yoke with which liberty in England has been enthralled. This is true despite the fact that the Bible clearly lays down the requirements of church discipline which, he submitted, Presbyterianism has purely embraced.² Episcopacy must be deemed guilty of the crime of deliberately transforming the discipline of the Church with tyrannous devices that have crushed out Christian liberty and driven thousands into exile.³ It has broken the unity of England and has dissevered the Church of England from every Protestant communion in Christendom. Thus, Milton concluded, "as they have unpeopl'd the kingdome by expulsion of so many thousands, as they have endeavor'd to lay the skirts of it bare by disheartning and dishonouring our loyallest confederates abroad, so have they hamstrung the valour of the subject by seeking to effeminate us all at home."⁴

It must be emphasized that Milton in these early tracts attacked one rigid discipline in order to sustain another exclusive religious system. He hoped to see the prelatical discipline destroyed and "the faithful feeding and disciplining" of the Church undertaken by Presbyterianism which, he held, was the divinely appointed church form. Calvinism, supported by its divinely ordained prescription, will maintain a firm government, restore unity, and cleanse the church of heresy and error. But—and here he is implicitly adamant in his aversion to persecution—the Church must accomplish these disciplinary ends by its own spiritual weapons. For the Church cleanses itself with the "dreadfull sponge of excommunication . . . which horrid sentence though it touch neither life, nor limme, nor any worldly possession, yet has it such a pene-

¹ Milton, John, *The reason of church government urg'd against prelacy* (L., 1641-2), in *Works*, I, 96-97.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, I, 105-106.

³ Milton, *Of reformation*, *Works*, I, 44-45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, I, 47. Tillyard (*Milton*, 127) regards this pamphlet as having been animated by a noble and sustaining confidence in the integrity of the individual man and as dominated by a passion for freedom. It would seem more accurate to say that it was ill-tempered in utterance, naïve in its suppositions, and sadly lacking in any true perception of the momentous issues at stake in England. To plead nobly for a bad position may contribute to art, hardly to thought.

trating force, that swifter than any chemicall sulphur, or that lightning which harms not the skin, and rifles the entrals, it scorches the inmost soul."¹ This awful and omniscient weapon of the Church stands ready to undertake the task of reformation which the prelates have neglected in their pursuit of private ambition and in their devotion to essentially secular ends.²

Milton's treatment of the vital question of the limits of Christian discipline suggests that his religious and intellectual position during these dark years was strikingly sympathetic to that body of thought which we have previously defined as moderate Presbyterianism.³ It was a point of view that instinctively sought some strong and ordered religious system with which to fill the vacuum left by the destruction of Anglicanism, that looked with grave apprehension upon the strange and anarchistic sects already rearing their heads in England, that stopped considerably short of the fanatical intensity of the Calvinistic literalists. This group desired, inherently, to fuse all of the diverse elements of Puritanism into a church which would allow scope for the spiritual individualism of a robust Protestantism while preserving intact the bounds of orthodoxy. It was a solution essentially English which the Scots never comprehended and which they not unnaturally branded as a betrayal of solemn obligations solemnly undertaken.

Milton addressed himself honestly and at length to the problem of heresy and sectarianism, which every sober man in England admitted had increased apace since the destruction of episcopal authority. But Milton stoutly alleged that the uniformity which had so recently been destroyed had been a unity of spiritual death. "If," he eloquently argued, "to bring a num[b] and chil stupidity of soul, an unactive blindness of minde upon the people by their leaden doctrine, or no doctrine at all, if to persecute all knowing and zealous Christians by the violence of their courts, be to keep away schisme, they keep away schisme indeed; and by this kind of discipline all Italy

¹ Milton, *Reason of church government*, *Works*, I, 171-172.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, I, 173-174.

³ *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 316-346, for a consideration of the thought of this notable and interesting group.

and Spaine is as purely and politickly kept from schisme as England hath beene by them.”¹ But the divisive and anarchistic tendencies of mankind cannot be controlled by these means. The Church may and should rear its solid and insurmountable walls of discipline. But above all else it must repose its destiny in the keen sword of spiritual strength with which the Lord has endowed it. The only way to prevent heresy and error is “to preach the gospell abundantly and powerfully throughout the land, to instruct the youth religiously, to endeavour how the scriptures may be easiest understood by all men.”² Error and heresy must not deter the Church from accomplishing a true reformation. England should proceed instantly and courageously to the reforming of the Church, “which is never brought to effect without the fierce encounter of truth and falshood together, if, as it were the splinters and shares of so violent a jousting, there fall from between the shock many fond errors and fanaticke opinions, which when truth has the upper hand, and the reformation shall be perfeted, will easily be rid out of the way, or kept so low, as that they shall be only the exercise of our knowledge, not the disturbance, or interruption of our faith.”³

b. The “Areopagitica” (1644)

Milton’s early thought must be regarded as conservative and as dedicated to the defence of an exclusive church system that promised a new, though he warmly hoped a moderated, intolerance to England. Implicit in his writings, however, was a brooding uncertainty, a distrust of the clerical mentality and integrity, and a nervous insistence upon the sovereignty of the individual whom he naïvely proposed to entrust to the mercies of a new orthodoxy. The disillusionment which was almost predictable when one contemplates the essential nature of his intellectual and moral position came quickly, violently, and dramatically. It was evident to Milton in 1644 that on the basis of fact and the announced intentions of the Presbyterian leadership in the Assembly, in Parliament, and in the principal

¹ Milton, *Reason of church government*, *Works*, I, 124-125.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, I, 129.

³ *Ib’id.* *Works*, I, 133-134.

pulpits of London, he had been cruelly betrayed on a profoundly important matter of faith and judgment.¹ That soaring and wrathful piece of pure prose argument, the *Areopagitica*, was the announcement of his revolt, if not the pronouncement of a new and more tenable intellectual position. Orthodox Puritan intolerance, he was driven to admit, had exposed England to new and terrible dangers.²

Though the *Areopagitica* is a brilliant and persuasive tract, it cannot be regarded as a landmark in the history of toleration.³ The pamphlet, which was written as a protest against Parliament's imposition of severe restrictions upon the freedom of the press, is the most skilful and sustained of all of Milton's prose writings; it is impregnated with a warm and powerful dynamic; it subtly combines superb reasoning with powerful emotion; it is, in essence, a masterly piece of pleading. But it must be stressed that the tract is only by indirection a plea for liberty of conscience or religious toleration. The author was concerned with flooding one corner of the disputed area of liberty with a hot luminosity, but he neglected the larger aspects of a critical and compelling issue even then in high debate.⁴ It is perhaps highly significant that the pamphlet was rarely used by the many exponents of toleration who during the next five years were to ransack every armoury of thought for weapons which could be bent to their purpose. The *Areopagitica* is a brilliant plea of a man who subjectively required an almost anarchistic liberty in which to think, write, and grow but who had not as yet disciplined this almost instinctive impulse to social ends.

Milton paid high compliment to the progress which Parliament had made in the carving out of a larger freedom, but warned the members that the *Ordinance for Printing* constituted an opening wedge which might be used for the destruction of liberty. No such coercive measure will be effective for the suppression of abusive and seditious books; it will rather have the effect of discouraging learning, blunting the cutting edge of

¹ Masson, *Life of John Milton*, III, 285.

² Tillyard, *Milton*, 158.

³ Cf. Lecky, *Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism*, II, 84; Bury, J. B., *A History of Freedom of Thought* (L., 1920), 99-100.

⁴ But cf. Tillyard, *Milton*, 173.

curiosity, and halting our progress towards knowledge.¹ It is "as good almost [to] kill a man as kill a good book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature . . . but hee who destroyes a good booke, kills reason it selfe. . . . We should be wary therefore what persecution we raise against the living labours of publick men, how we spill that season'd life of man preserv'd and stor'd up in books; since we see a kinde of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdome, and if it extend to the whole impression, a kinde of massacre."² The very disposition towards censorship, he alleged, betrays an essential intolerance that bodes ill for intellectual and spiritual freedom.

This growing intolerance that endangered the larger freedom which England was in painful process of winning was the fruit, Milton frankly submitted, of Presbyterian rigidity and intolerance. Milton broke finally with the Presbyterian system in the *Areopagitica*. If truth and learning are to be thus restrained in the name of orthodoxy, England has gained little indeed from the destruction of prelacy. For the Presbyterians display precisely the intolerant characteristics of the bishops.³ Even before attaining the dominance which they so passionately require, they have sought by cruel and coercive agencies to restrain and stultify the freedom of the human spirit. "The episcopall arts begin to bud again, the cruse of truth must run no more oyle,"⁴ and the yearning of mankind for a richer and larger knowledge must be sacrificed to the gloss which these peremptory spirits have chosen to stamp upon truth.

Milton displayed in the *Areopagitica* a chastened enthusiasm and a deep-seated scepticism concerning the possibility of knowing truth infallibly or of determining with accuracy between truth and error. Already, it is apparent, the scepticism that was to mark his mature thought was exerting a profoundly important influence on his mind. It is impossible, he wrote, to distinguish precisely between good and evil, truth and error. Man must seek truth to the best of his abilities and rest content with his personal decisions. "I cannot praise a fugitive and

¹ Milton, John, *Areopagitica; a speech for the liberty of unlicenc'd printing* (L., 1644), in *Works*, II, 399.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 400. ³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 429. ⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 430.

cloister'd vertue," he wrote, "unexercis'd and unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, notwithstanding dust and heat."¹ We gain our knowledge of truth by the trial of free experience and we cannot destroy evil by the simple expedient of ignoring it. Truth is in our age but dimly and imperfectly known. Those who seek to rule with an infallible authority would confine our knowledge to this present circumference. But man has not been created to endure this tyranny. "The light which we have gain'd, was giv'n us, not to be ever staring on, but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge." The pride and stupid ambition of those who are in the seats of power must not be permitted to stifle the breath of knowledge. Those men are the real schismatics who refuse to permit us "to unite those dissever'd peeces which are yet wanting to the body of truth. To be still searching what we know not, by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it."²

A living, growing society consequently has no alternative but to require a complete liberty in which the endless search for truth may be prosecuted. This priceless benefit every man may demand from the state. It is quite true that there will be disagreements; and there will be painful errors and fantastic heresies. But the Milton of the *Areopagitica* faced these unpleasant facts with a calmness that betokened the maturity which two critical years of English history had wrought in the body of his thought. For he now recommended "a little generous prudence, a little forbearance of one another, and some grain of charity" as the remedies calculated to preserve Christian liberty and as ultimately effective for the attainment of truth.³ Truth exists in many hues and patterns which now bewilder us, but we may be sure that every fragment has its place in the complete structure of knowledge.⁴ Mankind must set its face with quiet resolution and with complete liberty towards the attainment of a more spacious and perfect knowledge.

It may be held, then, that reason and free enquiry are the

¹ Milton, *Areopagitica*, *Works*, II, 411-412.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 436.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 438.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 440.

only means that we possess for the attainment of truth. God has endowed us as men with reason and has appointed us to the task of refining our nature by the trial of good and evil. Our spiritual being is matured and seasoned by these choices, which must be freely made. Truth and virtue may be attained, the good life realized, only in an environment of liberty of choosing. Surely it must be granted that God "esteems the growth and compleating of one vertuous person, more then the restraint of ten vitious."¹ Man must gain the enfranchisement of spiritual liberty before he can possibly realize the potentialities of his own nature. Consequently the restraints which ignorant and predatory persons seek to impose upon our liberty have no other effect than to destroy us.

Milton had by this date clearly embraced the doctrine of free will. He said in effect that man possesses the capacity to choose deliberately between good and evil. These decisions should be consciously and freely made if they are to have effective virtue in the moulding of the human soul. Hence error has its place in the ethical scheme as the moral contrast by which truth may be measured. The disposition which Milton had earlier shown to seek the coercion of error by disciplinary means was here forsworn. Nor was he longer preoccupied with the problem of spiritual disorder and intellectual dissension. These conditions, he seemed to hold, are not only inevitable but probably desirable in a free and evolving society.

In fact, Milton suggested, error and heresy have been loose and libellous terms employed by tyrannous men to secure the triumph of their own selfish wills. Obviously error must be faced honestly and fearlessly if it is to be analysed and refuted.² Surely even the orthodox will admit that heresy can work no harm in the man seized of truth, and certainly it can do no further injury to him who is already its captive. Truth is invincible against the shafts of heresy so long as her arms are unbound. "Her confuting is the best and surest" means of mastering error; "she needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licencings to make her victorious, those are the shifts and the defences that error uses against her power."³ All things remain

¹ Milton, *Areopagitica*, Works, II, 420.

² *Ibid.*, Works, II, 407-408.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, II, 443-444.

pure to the pure, who require only liberty and the free exercise of the gift of reason to accomplish the Lord's will.¹

The brilliant argument against intellectual intolerance had brought Milton to the threshold of a defence of religious liberty. Restraint, he repeatedly says, will neither advance truth nor secure the extermination of error. The orthodox have sought a simple solution to a problem as complex as the human soul. "Truth," he reminded his generation, "is compar'd in scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in a perpetuall progression, they sick'n into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition. A man may be a heretick in the truth; and if he beleieve things only because his pastor sayes so, or the Assembly so determines . . . though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds, becomes his heresie."² Man is a sovereign spiritual organism who cannot resign the warrant of his soul and mind to another authority. Hence any coercive uniformity, any infallibly imposed definition of truth will inevitably fail to attain its purpose and will destroy those who embrace it as truly as those who order it.³

We are driven, therefore, whether we will it or no, to the conviction that all beliefs and all dissent must enjoy toleration. Milton would except only popery and superstition, which, since they seek to destroy other faiths and invade the civil state, should themselves be extirpated.⁴ Society must protect itself as well, since no nation can tolerate anti-social conduct, against practices that are "impious or evil absolutely either against faith or manners." But every other belief and form of worship must be tolerated and encouraged. Confusion, variety, and clash of opinions will ensue, but this seething restlessness betokens a spiritual vitality that will slowly resolve itself into the complete mosaic of truth. This freedom England requires and she must be sure that men "puft up" with their own ambitions and intolerant designs are thrust aside if they seek to impose their puny wills upon a nation great with freedom.⁵

¹ Milton, *Areopagitica*, *Works*, II, 409-411.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 431.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 432.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 445.

⁵ *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 447-448.

c. *The period of silence, 1645-1659*

The *Areopagitica* illumined with the clear light of genius one phase of the discussion of the problem of liberty in England. The compulsion of the times and Milton's own strivings of faith would almost seem to have required from him a clear and forceful analysis of the complex and difficult issues underlying the case for religious freedom. We may be sure that Milton had by 1645 completely separated himself from the Presbyterians.¹ He had cut the ties that had for so long bound him at least loosely with Puritanism, to seek alone the solution to the spiritual problems which so vitally concerned him and his age. But during a long and intensely critical period in the history of his country Milton's mighty pen was still. Save for incidental references in his poetry and a few pages in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1648) he contributed nothing between 1644 and 1659 to the feverish discussion of the question of toleration, then the prime topic before the conscience and judgment of the nation. Furthermore, Haller has shown by painstaking research that until he became rather prominently identified with the government in 1649 his already published works exerted surprisingly little influence on the consideration and solution of ecclesiastical questions.²

Several suggestions may be advanced in explanation of Milton's silence. He had rushed into print prematurely and naïvely during the heat of the attack upon prelacy. He had undertaken with very rash commitments a position in defence of a Puritan Establishment which itself speedily evidenced those very evils that had so angered him in prelacy. He was disillusioned, perhaps not a little ashamed, and definitely embittered. It is certainly significant that what he did publish on the religious issue during these years was principally directed against a clerical arrogance which he discovered to be the same whether clothed in the vestments of Lambeth or in the gowns of Westminster. He was finding his way cautiously and alone; he was in these years slipping far out of the main stream of English religious thought into a strange and vast eddy whose depths he had first to plumb, whose circumference he had first

¹ Chauvet, Paul, *La Religion de Milton* (Paris, 1909), 106.

² Haller, *Tracts on liberty*, I, 129.

to explore. This explanation is confirmed by the fact that he had begun probably as early as 1655 the greatest of his religious works, *De Doctrina Christiana*,¹ which, like his own spiritual development, whose mirror it is,² he never completely finished. The greatest mind in a torn and distracted nation

"Sat on a hill retired
In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high
Of Providence, fore knowledge, will, and fate
Fixed fate, free will, fore knowledge absolute
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost."³

We have mentioned that Milton's published works in this period are unimportant in the history of toleration save that they display a deep and bitter animosity towards the clergy in general and the Presbyterians in particular. Presbyterianism has, he bluntly charged, been guilty of rigidity, supreme intolerance, and civil turbulence. He warned the orthodox divines that they courted ruin when they sought to establish dominance over the consciences of other men and to compel compliance in questions that could not be resolved by force. He sternly admonished them not to "oppose thir best friends and associats, who molest them not at all, infringe not the least of thir liberties," and who still patiently seek some *modus vivendi* which will permit all factions to live peacefully together.⁴ The destruction of one clerical tyranny constitutes no warrant for the imposition of another. Milton sternly demanded of the irreconcilable Presbyterians:

"Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword
To force our consciences that Christ set free,
And ride us with a classic hierarchy,
Taught ye by mere A.S. and Rutherford?
Men whose life, learning, faith, and pure intent,
Would have been held in high esteem with Paul
Must now be named and printed heretics."⁵

¹ We accept Hanford's view that the preparation of this monumental work was almost certainly begun in this period. *Vide* his careful argument, *The Date of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana*, in *Studies in Philology*, XVII (1920), 309-319; *et cf.* Saurat, *Milton*, 111. ² Tillyard, *Milton*, 173-174.

³ Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*, ii, 558-562, in *The Poetical Works, etc.*, II (ed. by David Masson) (L., 1890).

⁴ Milton, John, *The tenure of kings and magistrates, etc.* (L., 1648), in *Works*, II, 486.

⁵ Milton, John, *Sonnet On the Forces of Conscience under the Long Parliament* (L., 1646).

The monotonous and shrill intolerance of these men had at long last convinced Milton that "new Presbyter is but old priest writ large." For the Presbyterian clergy have steadily interfered in civil concerns and have sought by every possible expedient to force England into a mould of spiritual tyranny beside which even the persecution of the bishops pales.¹ The civil power has at last intervened to safeguard the priceless vessel of liberty of conscience against the steady and sinister efforts of a clerical faction that strives to achieve its own exaltation. England and her magistrate must guard this heritage of freedom jealously, for

"New foes arise,
Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.
Help us to save free conscience from the paw
Of hireling wolves, whose gospel is their maw."²

d. Mature thought: the period of fruition, 1659-1674

Milton's silence was broken in 1659 by the first of a series of works in which he addressed himself to a passionate, if belated, defence of religious and political liberty. We have previously indicated that his championship of religious freedom in this period added but slightly to a theory that then stood virtually complete. It should likewise be emphasized that his stalwart vindications of political and religious liberalism were even at the moment of their publication inundated by the already shifting tides of reaction to the revolutionary experiment. Milton had the ill fortune to swim somewhat sluggishly and ponderously in the tides of thought, to defend his causes either when they no longer required defence or when defence was no longer possible.

Milton's mature thought is notable for its doctrinal liberalism, for its almost anarchistic individualism, and for its acceptance of a theory of pure toleration. He had traversed the road of religious contemplation alone to arrive at a peak of decision which elevated him far above the warring sects of England and which effectively dissociated him from all institutional religion. He expressed the firm view in 1659 that religion must be

¹ Milton, *Tenure of kings and magistrates*, *Works*, II, 488-489.

² Milton, John, *Sonnet To the Lord General Cromwell* (L., 1652).

sharply and completely separated from the sphere of the civil government, if men were to attain that freedom and spiritual stature which God has ordained for them. The civil government should confine itself strictly to secular concerns and leave religion scrupulously free. Milton recalled that the bases of magistracy constantly shift, that the sect which enjoys its favour today may be under the cross of persecution tomorrow. Hence any law laid against one conscience will in time crush all consciences. Religion will be safe and free only when it escapes completely from the paralysing power of the magistrate.¹

The Church thus emancipated enjoys spiritual resources with which it may keep itself spotless. But the limits of its discipline are strictly defined by the limits of its membership. It possesses no other disciplinary capacity than excommunication, which must be regarded as a spiritual remedy designed for the cure of spiritual ills.² The Church, then, which is purely founded and which seeks to fulfil its divinely ordained mission is vested neither with the moral possibility nor with the physical capacity for persecution. Such a church will defend itself in the free arena of truth and will not stand aghast at the divisive forces which steadily reduce institutional religion into the ultimate terms of personality. It is precisely at this point that the entrenched interests of the clergy are endangered, that the symbol of uniformity is advanced to mask the selfish ambitions of a desperate and resourceful ministry.³ In order to preserve the tight and desiccated shell of institutional religion the clergy enlist the assistance of the magistrate, who has been perpetually and ignorantly frightened by the spectre of the spiritual sovereignty of individual men. In this infamous alliance of the civil state with a frightened and selfish clergy religion perishes and freedom vanishes.⁴ Religious men are reduced to a spiritual serfdom in which they are "content to lodge it in the breast, or rather in the books of a clergyman, and

¹ Milton, John, *A treatise of civil power in ecclesiastical causes; shewing that it is not lawfull for any power on earth to compell in matters of religion, etc.* (L., 1659), in *Works*, III, 302-303.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, III, 309-310.

³ Milton, John, *Considerations touching the likeliest means to remove hirelings out of the church, etc.* (L., 1659), in *Works*, III, 368-369 *et passim*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, III, 385

to take it thence by scraps and mammoths, as he dispenses it in his Sundays dole; they will be always learning, and never knowing," ever stricken with the numbing paralysis that possesses men who have lost their birthright of freedom.¹

The orthodox have secured the perpetuation of intolerant religious systems through a skilful but impious appeal to fear. They have persuaded the magistrate that spiritual individualism is somehow related to civil disorder; they have entrapped the pious conscience by their dishonest prating about unity.² They have, in fine, secured their infamous power over the conscience of mankind by parading the dread phantom of heresy. It is the instinct of all intolerant men to brand as heretical that view which is distinguished only by the fact of difference. "By the simple imputation of the name of heretic, they think that they have despatched their man at one blow."³ The intolerant have long terrified the Christian world by an inexact translation of the Greek word, *heresy*. Milton frankly confessed that he could discover neither moral nor religious wrong in the fact of heresy. For it can mean nothing more than the maintenance of a doctrine against the generally accepted interpretation which we derive from the Bible. But "seeing . . . that no man, no synod, no session of men, though call'd the Church, can judge definitively the sense of scripture to another mans conscience, which is well known to be a general maxim of the Protestant religion, it follows planely, that he who holds in religion that beleef or those opinions which to his conscience and utmost understanding appeer with most evidence or probabilitie in the scripture, though to others he seem erroneous, can no more be justly censur'd, for a heretic then his censurers; who do but the same thing themselves while they censure him for so doing."⁴ There is no punitive sting in the charge of heresy.

Heresy, indeed, may properly be regarded as indicative of a spiritual vitality that will inevitably lead man to a larger knowledge of religious truth. The term has no real meaning since we invariably measure propriety of belief by the standards of an

¹ Milton, *Treatise of civil power*, Works, III, 388.

² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, xii, 510-520.

³ Milton, John, *De doctrina Christiana*, in *Prose and poetical works* (L., 1853), IV, 8.

⁴ Milton, *Treatise of civil power*, Works, III, 311.

accidental and finite dominance of opinion. The heresy of today becomes the orthodoxy of tomorrow; the heresy of the West is the truth of the East. Prudent and honest analysis leads to the conclusion that man can attain religious truth by no means other than his own reason fortified by the guidance of the Holy Scriptures.¹ We may truthfully say, in fact, that only he is an heretic "who counts all heretics but himself."² With daring and profoundly revolutionary strokes Milton swept away the very bases of orthodox thought. He achieved a tolerant theory by destroying the intellectual possibility of a theory of coercion. He stoutly maintained that religion is seated firmly in the spiritual sovereignty of the individual Christian. When we invade that sovereignty we are guilty not only of soul-murder but of the destruction of religion itself.³ So bold was the sweep of his argument that Milton did not pause to condone heresy but applauded it as an indication of spiritual vitality and challenged the orthodox to defend the intellectual position from whence the countless crusades against heterodoxy had been launched.

The Christian Church must as the necessary condition of its existence free itself from the overweening intolerance of the clergy and purge itself of the fatal virus of persecution. We must proceed from the certain knowledge that the spirit cannot be touched by force, and that the spiritual weapons with which Christ has endowed His Church are wholly competent for the attainment of the Kingdom of God. All of the cruelty and sadistic coercion that have shamed the history of the Church will not have been expiated until the sovereignty of the individual man is accepted as the ultimate unit in religion.⁴ Force and persecution have been the impious instruments of men who have conspired to destroy the human soul and to ravish the Church. They have laid arrogant claim to a power which mortal man does not possess, and

"from that pretence,
Spiritual laws by carnal power shall force
On every conscience—laws which none shall find

¹ Milton, *Treatise of civil power*, *Works*, III, 312.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, III, 312-313.

³ Morley, John, *Oliver Cromwell* (L., 1900), 167.

⁴ Milton, *Treatise of civil power*, *Works*, III, 319.

THE LAYMEN AND THE MODERATES

Left them enrolled, or what the Spirit within
Shall on the heart engrave. What will they then
But force the Spirit of Grace itself, and bind
His consort, Liberty? what but unbuild
His living temples, built by faith to stand—
Their own faith, not another's? for, on Earth,
Who against faith and conscience can be heard
Infallible?"¹

The force which these infamous bigots would employ can have no other consequence than to compel men to embrace a formal hypocrisy and to define Christianity in terms wholly strange to Christ.² For they would re-establish the imperfect law of the Jews and deny not only the spirit of Christ's teaching but the efficacy of His sacrifice.

Surely the philosophy of persecution will be disowned by the Christian world. Surely those desperate spirits who take up the terrible weapons of compulsion will be denounced, for these are men "who think the gospel, which both began and spread over the whole world for above three hundred years under heathen and persecuting emperors, cannot stand or continue, supported by the same divine presence and protection to the worlds end."³ The Christian Church must dissociate itself completely from every counsel of coercion and base itself infallibly upon the solid foundations of tolerance. Nor will it be defenceless in this environment of absolute liberty. Then, at last, heresy and error will "be hindered by fit and proper means ordained in church-discipline; by instant and powerful demonstrations to the contrarie; by opposing truth to error, no unequal match; truth the strong to error the weak though slie and shifting." Then and only then will the tree of faith and truth grow tall and straight, strengthened and nourished by roots that strike deep into the solid soil of free enquiry.

It is tragic, Milton concluded, that every sect upon attaining dominance and respectability disowns those principles of tolerance and free judgment in which it was conceived and nurtured. Institutional churches speedily lose the vitality which marks their origin and seek by irreligious and cruel means to

¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, xii, 520-530.

² Milton, *Treatise of civil power*, *Works*, III, 320.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, III, 321.

perpetuate a spiritual structure that is dead. Catholicism, in Milton's judgment, had for so long been committed in policy and philosophy to a rigidity of belief and to a worship inspired by persecution that little hope could be entertained for its regeneration. Furthermore, Catholicism has ever been consistently devoted to a theory of persecution which happens to be unchristian. But no rationalization from history can be framed in defence of the savage intolerance of the Protestant sects. For Protestantism teaches as its own *raison d'être* the absolute right and duty of the individual Christian to exercise his private judgment. But that which its doctrine admits, its discipline forbids. The intolerance of the Protestant has no greater weight or credence than the authority of an individual man; Catholicism can at least plead tradition and the pretension, philosophically entertained, of infallibility. "No Protestant therefore of what sect soever following scripture only, which is the common sect wherin they all agree, and the granted rule of everie mans conscience to himself, ought, by the common doctrine of Protestants, to be forc'd or molested for religion."¹ When the Protestant avows the principle of persecution he destroys at once religion and the intellectual foundation of his own repudiation of the Roman claim to an exclusive and catholic authority.

Milton so narrowed the plausible grounds of religious intolerance as to extinguish every assumption which could be brought forward in its favour. He had shown by careful argument that coercion of whatever degree for whatever end destroys the very fabric of religion. He had demonstrated that the well-springs of persecution lie hidden deep in the fears, ambitions, and cupidity of mankind, that its origin is wholly unrelated to that Christianity which Christ envisaged. The persecuting man may truly be said to levy war against Christ in the name of Christ. Hence persecution is without support in morality, in reason, or in religion; it defiles and ravages that which it pretends to defend. Men, as men and as Christians, must rise up to destroy it as a devouring monster.

Milton had effectively demolished in his own theory the historical and philosophical foundations upon which the

¹ Milton, *Treatise of civil power*, Works, III, 317.

churches of Christendom had based themselves. Almost incidentally he had exposed and had then repudiated with a savage logic the theory of religious persecution. He had in effect declared that the individual human being stood alone, that he must find truth and salvation without the comfortable but ruinous support of the institutions which men have devised as if to secure their own destruction. God has blessed men with all of the resources, indeed with the only resources, required for their emancipation and salvation. Every man has to illumine his steps the counsel of the Bible and the unerring persuasion of natural reason.¹ Man owes no allegiance in his spiritual life save to the laws of God which inform him of God's purpose concerning his destiny. This law is either written or unwritten." The unwritten law is no other than that law of nature given originally to Adam,² and of which a certain remnant "still dwells in the hearts of all mankind; which, in the regenerate, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is daily tending towards a renewal" of its primitive brightness.³ The man who casts himself upon those resources with which God has endowed him has nothing to fear from error and the darkness of his own understanding. For we must know that

"God hath now sent his living Oracle
Into the world to teach his final will,
And sends his Spirit of Truth henceforth to dwell
In pious hearts, an inward oracle
To all truth requisite for men to know."⁴

We are guided with the flaming torch of reason, which Milton evidently believed should be regarded as possessing an illumination superior to that of the scripture itself.⁵ For the "external Scripture or written Word" has been subjected to so much

¹ Cf. Tillyard, *Milton*, 215.

² "Yet know withal,
Since thy original lapse, true liberty
Is lost, which always with right reason dwells
Twinned, and from her hath no dividual being."

—(Michael to Adam, *Paradise Lost*, xii, 79-90, for the full passage.)

³ Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*, Works, IV, 378.

⁴ Milton, John, *Paradise Regained*, i, 460-464, in *Poetical Works*, II.

⁵ Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*, Works, IV, 447.

distortion and corruption that we can trust nothing else than our reason in deriving judgments from it.

Few religious thinkers have ever dealt with the Bible as rationally and as coolly as did Milton.¹ He seemed to regard it as a quarry in which the sharp tool of the human reason must cut out the granite blocks of truth. Every man can there find religious truth for himself, partly because all things necessary for our belief are clearly and simply defined and partly because Christ will illumine our path with the light of reason.² This we have been promised, and certainly

"He who receives
Light from above, from the fountain of light,
No other doctrine needs."

The way that beckons the feet of our faith is clear and easy so long as the human reason and conscience are left free. Men have wandered in darkness and error principally because an imperious clergy persist in darkening "the most momentous truths of religion by intricate metaphysical comments . . . stringing together all the useless technicalities and empty distinctions of scholastic barbarism, for the purpose of elucidating those scriptures, which they are continually extolling as models of plainness."³

Every human being, it must be evident, has been constituted an ultimate and final authority in matters of faith. Every man enjoys the "right to interpret the Scriptures for himself, inasmuch as he has the spirit for his guide, and the mind of Christ is in him." The formularies of the Church, the voice of tradition, the counsel of the clergy are effective only in so far as they confirm the stalwart judgment of the free man. The dignity of the human mind must not be overthrown by the crude barbarism of force.

"A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
What matter where, if I be still the same."⁴

¹ Tillyard, *Milton*, 217-218.

² Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*, *Works*, IV, 441.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, IV, 441-442.

⁴ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, i, 253-256.

Every Christian searcher after truth must stand firm in the liberty which God has granted him, he must arrive at an understanding of truth in his own way and in his own time. This is the way which God enjoins. When we entrust our conscience and reason to an external authority we not only destroy our own liberty but clasp a yoke upon the Holy Spirit which stands ready to help us when we stumble.¹ Man is divinely advised, Milton caused his Raphael to say, that

"God made thee perfect, not immutable;
And good he made thee; but to persevere
He left it in thy power—ordained thy will
By nature free, not over-ruled by fate
Inextricable, or strict necessity."²

The circumference of freedom alone limits the knowledge of the human intellect; the quality of man's liberty imposes the only measure of his faith.

Milton during his later life repudiated without reservation the principal assumptions of orthodox dogma. He found spiritual peace in the central conviction that every man must apprehend truth for himself; he discovered serenity in the certain belief that every human being possesses abundant capacities for the attainment of salvation. The scripture, he wrote, "offers salvation and eternal life equally to all, under the condition of obedience in the Old Testament, and of faith in the New."³ Milton came at the end of his own spiritual strivings to possess an unusual faith in the dignity and nobility of man. God led man with the halter of law in ancient times, but has loosed him under the gospel so that he might grow god-like in mature and self-sustaining strength. God so loves and trusts man that He has left him free. In *Paradise Lost* Milton causes God to say:

"Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut.
And I will place within them as a guide
My umpire Conscience; whom if they will hear,
Light after light well used they shall attain,
And to the end persisting safe arrive."⁴

¹ Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*, Works, IV, 450.

² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, v, 523-528.

³ Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*, Works, IV, 50.

⁴ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, iii, 193-197.

That which God has left free only those debased spirits that hate God will seek to enslave.

This view of faith and this high estimate of the divinely gifted integrity of the human mind caused Milton to renounce in periods that ring with the clear tone of pure genius the entire content of the doctrine of predestination. Throwing off completely the surviving elements of his earlier orthodoxy, he denounced the doctrine as a knot that had secured those cords of scholastic dogma which had so long and so ruinously bound the human spirit. We may be sure that

"God left free the Will; for what obeys
Reason is free; and Reason he made right."¹

The doctrine must be regarded as a subtle invention which destroys the very meaning of religion and separates men irremediably from the mercy of God.² Well may God enquire, "What pleasure I, from such obedience paid, when will and reason . . . useless and vain . . . had served necessity, not me."³ Some men will achieve a peculiar grace through their own merit, but all men when they are left free will find the truth of God. For God will for the attainment of His own designs "clear their senses dark" and "soften stony hearts to pray, repent, and bring obedience due."⁴ We may with complete safety repose our trust in the conviction that God in His infinite mercy has "predestinated to salvation all who should believe."⁵ God has made man the master of his own spiritual destiny, has marked him with a nobility which man has himself despoiled. No human being has been singled out for salvation and none for damnation. Those who preach this fraudulent doctrine contrive to enslave mankind and blaspheme the mercy of God. For there is no decree of God

"Concurring to necessitate his fall,
Or touch with lightest moment of impulse
His free will, to her own inclining left
In even scale."⁶

¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ix, 351-352; v, 229-237.

² Hunt, John, *Religious Thought in England from the Reformation to the End of Last Century* (L., 1870-1873), I, 192-193.

³ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, iii, 100-110.

⁵ Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*, Works, IV, 57.

⁴ *Ibid.*, iii, 183-190.

⁶ *Ibid.*, x, 43-47.

The will and conscience of man stand free; his dignity and nobility partake of divinity itself; he requires only complete liberty of the spirit in order to realize the rich potentialities with which a merciful God has blessed him.

Milton had given careful and thoughtful attention to those forces in human environment which prevent the attainment of that state of absolute liberty of conscience so necessary to the Church and to mankind. When men quietly contemplate the responsibility which rests upon their own consciences—a responsibility which no external agency can assume—they will surely require an absolute freedom of the spirit from those institutions which they have founded for their own preservation. No man can be certain that he has attained full or perfect knowledge, but we do know that we endanger our soul when we accept any tuition other than that provided by our own understanding.¹ Every man must seek truth in his own way and he can find it only if his liberty is unimpaired. Milton causes God to say in *Paradise Lost*:

“I formed them free, and free they must remain
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Their nature, and revoke the high decree
Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained
Their freedom.”²

Those who would infringe upon the religious liberty of any human being stand condemned of a preposterous and blasphemous arrogance.³ “If any man shall pretend, that the scripture judges to his conscience for other men, he makes himself greater not only then the Church, but also then the scripture, then the consciences of other men; a presumption too high for any mortal.”³ No blemish in reason or in divinity can be levied against the perfect freedom which is ours. It is this freedom which we must demand and defend for the safety of our souls and as the badge of our manhood. It is this freedom which we must perpetuate and fructify by affording to all men and to all creeds the inestimable benefits of religious toleration.⁴

¹ Milton, *Treatise of civil power*, Works, III, 306.

² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, iii, 124-128.

³ Milton, *Treatise of civil power*, Works, III, 307.

⁴ Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*, Works, IV, 2-7.

Milton's defence of religious liberty gained in vigour and clarity what it wanted in systematization and completeness. Liberty of conscience, he wrote, is necessitated by the fact that through it alone men can attain a saving faith. No reservations, no exceptions can be raised for its restraint since that would be to destroy its substance.¹ We must know that when coercion, however limited, is introduced into religion, faith itself flies out the window. "Who can be at rest," he enquired in the *Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, "who can enjoy anything in this world with contentment, who hath not liberty to serve God and save his own soul according to the light which God hath planted in him to that purpose, by the reading of his revealed will and the guidance of his Holy Spirit?" When we deny our fellow men this complete liberty we destroy with one stroke the gospel and establish the law. This action of persecution may be undertaken with a pure or with a base motive, but its effect is in both cases equally ruinous.

All the arguments that have been proposed in support of persecution may, Milton maintained, be reduced to three heads: that coercion is employed to secure the glory of God, the spiritual good of the heretic, or the temporal punishment of a scandalous action. None of these positions can be regarded as other than patently specious. With reference to the first two assumptions, it can scarcely be held that God's glory or the regeneration of the lost can be accomplished by agencies which He has specifically prohibited for that use.² As to the third, it is quite impossible that scandal can be cured by means of persecution. We may not heal one conscience by wounding another, nor can scandal be averted by forcing men to a religious observance which has no meaning for them.³ We should reflect again and again upon the fact that Christ employed force only once, and that was to drive the profane out of the Temple, not into it. Force has no curative quality; its effect in religion is to confirm the lost in their errors and to gain for them the accolade of martyrdom. Above all, the brutish arm of

¹ Milton, *Treatise of civil power*, *Works*, III, 327.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, III, 329-331.

³ "To compell the licentious in his licentiousness, and the conscientious against his conscience . . . tends not to the honor of God, but to the multiplying and the aggravating of sin." (*Ibid.*, *Works*, III, 332.)

force invades the perfect freedom which the gospel gained for mankind. No warrant, therefore, can be posed to support the constraint of conscience; "When the magistrate takes away this liberty, he takes away the gospel itself; he deprives the good and bad indiscriminately of their privilege of free judgment."¹ We may be sure that an omniscient God was well apprised of the sin and error which would assail His Church. Yet He left religion absolutely free and by prescription confined the limits of discipline "to each particular church by perswasive and spiritual means within itself."²

Milton never specifically defined the limits which he would set for religious toleration. In one particular, however, he suggested a most important limitation which would seem to belie the entire weight of his argument for the necessity of an unconditional liberty. In common with most Englishmen of his day and with almost all men who had been educated as Puritans, he was deeply persuaded that Roman Catholicism constituted a grave menace to the state and an intolerable insult to true religion. Indeed, he regarded Catholicism as rather more a principality than a religion, "justly therfore to be suspected, not tolerated by the magistrate of another countrey."³ The Catholic conscience has been enslaved for so long that it cannot properly be called a conscience at all. Furthermore, Catholicism openly avows its intention to persecute other faiths once it has attained a dominant position, thereby excluding itself from that liberty which other sects should enjoy. Then too, Romanism is guilty of such gross idolatry and impiety that it should be regarded as an open scandal which no magistrate can be expected to tolerate.⁴ In this instance it seems evident that Milton's hatred and fear of Rome led him to conclusions which vitiated every element of his mature thought. Had he not himself suggested that fear is ever the mother of intolerance?

It was Milton's misfortune to train the thundering artillery of his thought upon the ramparts of intolerance at the moment when that reaction, in politics and religion, which we call the Restoration was at hand. Powerless to stay the course of the

¹ Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*, Works, IV, 402.

² Milton, *Treatise of civil power*, Works, III, 335.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, III, 317.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Works, III, 318.

dynamic of history, he bravely risked his own safety in the coming regime by boldly reminding the quarrelling sects and the ambitious politicians that their failure to discover the grounds of political unity endangered the beneficent principle of liberty of conscience.¹ Surely, he wrote in 1660, religious freedom stands as the greatest gain that two decades of war and revolution have brought. All this will be sacrificed with the restoration of the monarchy. England, he predicted, will soon find "the old encroachments coming on by little and little upon our consciences, which must necessarily proceed from king and bishop united inseparably in one interest."² That light which has been gained will be extinguished; that vitality and spiritual vigour which has been the first fruit of toleration will wither and die before the hot blasts of a renewed persecution. Political liberalism and freedom of conscience, he sternly warned the nation, are inseparably joined.³ He who sacrifices the one betrays the other.

We cannot believe that Milton ever considered the full implications of religious liberty or that he ever understood the full gravity of the great struggle which was waged in its behalf during his mature life. Too much an individualist to attach himself to any party, embittered and disillusioned by the ill-placed confidence of his youth, pushing ever farther into a spiritual position which isolated him from his fellows, he could not in the very nature of his personality and genius join those who in the period of the greatest crisis were so firmly bound in the defence of religious liberty. His wrath against the persecutors and the hirelings was jovian; his brooding genius played luminously and momentarily upon segments of the discussion to pass on to other matters that concerned him more; his almost anarchistic vindication of his own spiritual liberty only by indirection championed the freedom of other men. Men such as Milton inspire us when they cannot lead us. Surely his own magnificent courage, the contemptuous and mighty strokes with which he cut through the tangled brush of

¹ Milton, John, *A letter to a friend, concerning the ruptures of the Commonwealth* (L., 1659), *Works*, III, 403.

² Milton, John, *The ready and easy way to establish a free commonwealth, etc.* (L., 1650), *Works*, III, 426-427.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, III, 448-449.

tradition and authority to obtain a clearer vista and a higher vantage ground, the almost reckless emancipation of his own titanic spirit counselled little men to require that full portion of freedom which one of the great of the earth had taken as his own.

8. ABRAHAM COWLEY, 1618-1667

The stress and strain which political and religious revolution imposed upon seventeenth-century Englishmen led in many instances to a refinement of spirit and to a philosophical acceptance of historical realities. We have observed that Milton's genius was formed and emboldened by the shock of conflict. Other sensitive spirits display, however, particularly on the question of religion, a kind of ennui which foreshadows the indifference of the Restoration and the disbelief of the eighteenth century. Religious indifference is perhaps the principal negative cause underlying the development of toleration. But there is a stage which precedes indifference, an attitude, born of conflicting dogmas and warring orthodoxies, which asks nothing else than peace and a narrow but sacrosanct circle in which the human spirit may find peace and rest. Such men seek no victory over others; such men have fathomed the bottomless intolerance of fanaticism; such men desire nothing more than the possibility of preserving the integrity of self in a world gone mad. The spirit of England was tired after the bitter conflict of opposed political theories and clashing orthodoxies which zealous partisans desired to impose upon the nation by the weight of the sword. The fire of fanaticism had burned too brightly and too long; it had consumed its own substance. These powerful forces were to mould the mind of the Restoration which was able to find, in an age of almost savage reaction, no sounder basis for persecution than policy or revenge. England stood at the door-way of toleration in 1660.

These influences may be observed in the sensitive genius of the royalist poet, Abraham Cowley. Born in London in 1618, the posthumous son of a statesman, Cowley composed verses of distinction while still a student at Westminster School. He entered Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1636, where he pro-

ceeded B.A. in 1639 and M.A. three years later. Already, he informs us in his essay *Of Myselfe*, he had disowned renown and preferment in order to preserve integrity of mind. "This only grant me," he prayed:

"That my means may lye
Too low for envy, for contempt too high.
Some honour I would have
Not from great deeds, but good alone.
The unknown are better than ill known."

Chosen a fellow of his college in 1640, Cowley hoped to find in the academic cloister the repose to which he had dedicated himself, but he "was soon torn from thence by that violent publick storm which would suffer nothing to stand where it did."¹ He sought to escape from the turmoil of war by retiring abroad, where in 1646 he joined the court of the queen. But he was speedily disillusioned by his contact with the great,² and returned to England, where he was for some time imprisoned as a royalist agent. He was rewarded after the Restoration with a grant of land at Chertsey, where he retired happily to the life of seclusion and contemplation for which he had always yearned. "Nothing," he wrote, "shall separate me from a mistress, which I have lov'd so long, and have now at last marry'd; though she neither has brought me a rich portion, nor liv'd yet so quietly with me as I hop'd from her."³

Cowley's thought was marked by a calm and steady devotion to reason as the sole guide for the human spirit amidst the confusion and the shrill claims of fanaticism. Despite his personal sufferings and his own devotion to the historic Church, his religious speculations remained cool, detached, and firmly grounded in that moderate reasonableness that had marked the temper of Falkland and his group. In the words of Loiseau, he reasoned and meditated without passion on the obscure passages of the Bible and the delicate questions of dogma.⁴ He

¹ Cowley, Abraham, *The complete works in verse and prose, etc.* (ed. by A. B. Grosart) ([Edinburgh], 1881), II, 340.

² "I met with several great persons, whom I liked very well, but could not perceive that any part of their greatness was to be lik'd or desir'd." (*Ibid.*, II, 340-341.)

³ For similar sentiments, *vide ibid.*, II, 311 ff., 316 ff.

⁴ Loiseau, Jean, *Abraham Cowley, Sa Vie, Son Œuvre* (Paris, 1931), 204.

remained quietly devoted to a broad and tolerant conception of the Church of England in which he discovered the finest possibilities of moderation, reason, and decent order.

Every man, Cowley taught, must anchor his faith firmly to reason if he is to remain stable in the contrary winds which strike the bark of religion from every quarter.

"Some blind themselves, 'cause possibly they may
Be led by others a right way;
They build on sands, which if unmoved they find,
'Tis but because there was no wind.
Less hard 'tis, not to erre ourselves, then know
If our fore-fathers err'd or no.
When we trust men concerning God, we then
Trust not God concerning men."¹

Reason, therefore, must not bow before the peremptory claims of authority. Nor should it be deluded by the febrile phantoms conjured up by revelation. Cowley, like most conservative men of his age, had observed so many eccentric faiths rise on the mystical sands of revelation that he practically excluded it as incompatible with reason. When we surrender ourselves to revelation we are "like senseless chymists" who "their own wealth destroy, imaginary gold 't enjoy." Reason remains our only certain guide, "which (God be prais'd) still walks, for all."

It is true that many of God's mysteries can never be penetrated even by reason. There are matters of divinity which we accept by faith. But that which cannot be given rational demonstration enjoys no more than a subjective validity.

"Our course by stars we cannot know,
Without the compass too below.
Though reason cannot through faith's myst'ries see
It sees that there and such they bee;
Leads to heaven's-door, and there does humbly keep,
And there through chinks and key-holes peep.
Though it, like Moses, by a sad command
Must not come into th' Holy Land.
Yet thither it infallibly does guid,
And from afar 'tis all descryed."²

Only God can fully understand His truth. It is our destiny to master by means of reason that area of truth which the resources

¹ Cowley, *Complete works*, I, 145.

² *Ibid.*, I, 146.

at our command enable us to comprehend. This and nothing more a merciful God requires of His children.

Despite the conceits and poetic subjects which often obscure Cowley's thought, it is evident that his religious faith was tintured by a pervading scepticism and a deep-rooted pessimism. We have frequently emphasized the fact that the fruit of two generations of religious preoccupation in England was a wide-spread indifference sustained by granite ledges of scepticism. It is inevitable in an age when too many exclusive and fanatical truths contend for mastery that reasonable men begin to question and then to deny the intellectual and moral bases from which such claims are advanced. Infallibility presumes catholicity, and when catholicity does not in fact exist the claims of infallibility become intellectually absurd and socially dangerous. These were the influences which cause Cowley to question so vehemently the honesty of the dogmatism against which "there is no knowledge." Man knows nothing certainly, whether in nature or in divinity. He seeks to hide the nakedness of his knowledge by a "useless pride" which "searches probabilities, and rhetorick, and fallacies."¹ Thus persecution and zeal spring from the ignorance and fear of weak men who cover their fears and confusion by a swaggering pose of infallibility.

The pitiful ignorance of men who are vicious only because they are afraid, the empty and conflicting pretensions of proud churches, and the uncertainty which envelops the orb of truth caused Cowley to meditate upon life with a pessimism that could at times be morbid.² The poet reflected that

"We grow at last by custom to believe,
That really we live;
Whilst all these shadows that for things we take,
Are but the empty dreams which in death's sleep
we make."³

We seek by presumption to lift ourselves into knowledge, by harsh cries to obscure the soft warnings of our own uncertainty. Men are not lords of their fate, rather "an unseen hand makes

¹ Cowley, *Complete works*, I, 145.

² *Ibid.*, II, 22-23.

³ *Ibid.*, II, 27.

all their moves." Man struggles pitifully against a fate which masters him. Cowley enquires:

"With fate, what boots it to contend?
Such I began, such am, and so must end.
The star that did my being frame,
Was but a lambent flame,
And some small light it did dispenge,
But neither heat nor influence."¹

Such a view of life discards as its first premise that intellectual arrogance which inspires religious persecution. This philosophy requires no more than peace and retirement in which life may adjust itself as agreeably as possible to the requirements that reason imposes upon human conduct and the limitations which it sets upon human hopes. And this repose the tolerant man gladly extends to all men, for they too stand naked and frightened before God.

Cowley was imbued, then, with a tolerance which, while it may have been negative, was complete. He was so securely withdrawn from the snarling clash of rival bigotries that he could observe the spectacle which was wasting the substance of religion in England with a contempt not unmixed with pity. Just as

". . . two rude waves, by storms together thrown,
Roar at each other, fight, and then grow one,
Religion is a circle; men contend,
And run the round in dispute without end."²

The sects destroy each other in the name of definitions and seek to bind the human conscience to mysteries which they can neither explain nor sustain. Reason is despoiled, religion is wasted, yet when the circle of dispute and persecution has at last been closed it is discovered that men who destroyed each other did so in the name of the same faith and the same knowledge.

Hence Cowley concluded that all of the zeal and persecution with which men prosecute their dim delusions are but flaming

¹ Cowley, *Complete works*, II, 21.

² Cowley, Abraham, *The puritan and the papist, etc.* (L., 1643, 1682), I.

tokens of their fears and want of knowledge. In the vast ambit of the divine scheme our frantic and rigid definitions of truth appear as insolent and feeble dams set up against the immensity of knowledge. Who dares speak of immortality, of the time when "the scattered atoms come back to their ancient home"? Who dares exclude men from that resurrection in which all vitality, of earth, of sea, and the universe, will ultimately assume its ordered place? We are creatures crouched upon a

"Vain weak-built isthmus, which dost proudly rise
Up betwixt two eternities;
Yet canst nor wave nor wind sustain,
But broken and o'erwhelmed, the endless oceans
meet again."

Such a temper of mind nurtures the finest tolerance that the human spirit can know. It is a mind from which the dross of arrogance has been refined; it is a mind which in the nobility of its own poise has come to know that the circumference of human knowledge is limited and the unexplored frontiers of reality infinite.

Cowley, as we have said, remained devoted to the Church of England which he defined with a truly Latitudinarian moderation. In his judgment, that conception of the Church alone offered Englishmen the possibility of moderation in religion and in it alone could the open wounds left by sectarian strife find their cure. Writing in 1660, he summoned England to return to that Church in order to regain spiritual peace. A trial has been made of sectarianism with the result that fanaticism has held sway and the gates of heaven have been perceptibly narrowed.¹ He accused the Protectorate of having robbed the Church of its vitality in the name of reformation, with the consequence that it was consumed by a rage of sects.² He asked that thinking men should no more be driven from piety by the fear of popery and that Christian liberty be protected against an anarchy of extremism. Order, decency, and moderation must

¹ Generosus, A. C. (i.e., Cowley, Abraham), *Ad populum or, a lecture to the people, etc.* (L., 1660), no page.

² Cowley, *Complete works*, II, 298.

be restored in England if vigour of spirit and freedom of conscience are to survive. Cowley implored Englishmen to

“Grow charitable againe; let not your hate
And private spleene bring forth a publike fate.”¹

England, he taught, at a moment when the currents of reaction and revenge ran strong, must attain greatness of spirit and absorb the poisons of intolerance and fanatical zeal in a large charity and a comprehension born of humility.

This spirit, which certainly animated few former royalist refugees, he dwells on insistently in his own bucolic essays. These remarkable pieces, which have been too much neglected, reveal a soul that has found repose and a gently sceptical spirit that thought and wrote like an English Montaigne. “I confess,” he wrote, “I love littleness almost in all things. A little convenient estate, a little chearful house, a little company, a very little feast, and if I were ever to fall in love again (which is a great passion, and therefore, I hope, I have done with it) it would be, I think, with prettiness, rather than with majestic beauty.”² Here is an attitude of mind, a balance of judgment, from which a great and abiding tolerance may flow. The temper of England had changed profoundly in the crucible of a generation of bitter conflict. It had grown indifferent to many issues that once burned with incandescence; it had grown sceptical in areas of thought once torn by divisive certainties, and had earned at least a little tolerance in the school of great suffering.

Yet it would misrepresent the content of Cowley’s thought to depict it as philosophical quietism. His was a moderation and tolerance that could strike out with wit and savage irony against the prevalent fanaticisms, which he regarded as the mortal enemy of the repose and integrity that he claimed for himself. He intensely disliked both the arrogance and the persecution that had marked the history of the Roman Church; he hotly denounced the bigoted determination of Puritanism and most forms of sectarianism to impose a rigidly defined body of truth

¹ Cowley, *Ad populum*.

² Cowley, *Complete works*, II, 329. Space does not warrant the further analysis of this temper of mind. But see his *Essays: Of Avarice, The Dangers of an Honest Man in Much Company, Shortness of Life, and Of Myself*.

upon consciences not fully persuaded.¹ Both, he charged, with direct address to Puritanism,

“ . . . keep the Bible from lay-men, but ye
 Avoid this, for ye have no layety.
 They, in a forraign and, unknown tongue pray,
 You in an unknown sence your prayers say:
 So that this difference 'twixt ye does ensue,
 Fools understand not them, not wise men you.”²

One, he held, destroyed the conscience by subjecting it to the requirements of a blind obedience; the other left it the prey of fanaticism, faction, and rebellion.³ Both hate each other with a venom born of their mutual fanaticism.⁴ Both endanger the very essence of truth and both plot nothing less than the enslavement of the human conscience.

Cowley distrusted the honesty, indeed the very sanity, of all religious zealots.⁵ He says that he is prepared to tolerate any honest error, but he cannot admit to his charity the “prophane, who counterfeit the softness of the voyce of holyness to disguise the roughnes of the hands of impiety.”⁶ Sectarianism in England has pleaded for liberty while it has consumed the Church and has pressed faith into the forms of a rigid and presumptuous definition of truth.⁷ The rash of sectarianism, which has so obscured the face of truth in England, which has consumed that moderation that should mark all religious discussion, has no valid support either in reason or in scripture. These fanatics have been driven to found their eccentric and antisocial tenets upon extravagant claims of divine guidance or upon revelation, that crutch of all unbalanced men.⁸ These men are intolerant because they are weak, fanatical because they are irrational, dangerous because they are animated by hatred. The delicate vessel of moderation and tolerance cannot for long survive the threshing winds of bigoted intolerance.

¹ Cowley, Abraham, *Cutter of Coleman-Street* (L., 1663), Pref.; *Complete works*, II, 261-262.

² Cowley, *Puritan and papist*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 3, 5.

⁴ Cowley, *Complete works*, I, 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 271; *Cutter of Coleman-Street*, *passim*.

⁶ Cowley, *Complete works*, II, 264, 302.

⁷ Generosus, A. C. (i.e., Cowley, Abraham), *A satyre against seperatists, etc.* (L., 1642), 7; *Cutter of Coleman-Street*, esp. act III, 6, 12; act IV, 5; act V, 6.

⁸ Cowley, *Complete works*, II, 302 ff.

The circle of Cowley's thought was completed by an all too scanty exposition of a truly noble theory of toleration and moderation. As Loiseau has well said, he stands with Falkland and his rare group in warm devotion to the ideal of tolerance.¹ As he contemplated the weakness of humanity, the frightening limitations upon our knowledge, and the inescapable responsibility of every human being for his own soul, religious tolerance appeared to Cowley to be the only solvent for the hardened and irrational convictions of his age. Men who could not agree might at least live in peace together. Every soul must seek and gain free scope within which it may arrive at its own maturity.

Englishmen, he concluded, may face the future which tolerance holds out with courage and equanimity. God has made His essential verities clear and that which is not clear is not worth a drop of blood or a moment's strife. We know only that God is just in His commandments and wonderful in His works.² We are required, since we know so little, to do no more than walk justly and humbly before God. Men have ravaged the world in their effort to found exclusive churches which would mirror that invisible, that true Church about which we know so little and of which all who seek God earnestly are members in faith. No lines of creed, no trivial formulae, no arrogant prescriptions can destroy the fellowship of that Church of good and tolerant men. This high tolerance Cowley claimed as the right of all just men when he wrote in praise of Crashaw, a Catholic:

"Pardon, my mother church, if I consent
That angels led him when from thee he went;
For ev'n in error sure no danger is
When joyn'd with so much piety as his.
Ah, mighty God, with shame I speak't, and grief,
Ah that our greatest faults were in belief!
And our weak reason were even weaker yet,
Rather than thus our wills too strong for it.
His faith perhaps in some nice tenents might
Be wrong; his life, I'm sure, was in the right."³

¹ Loiseau, *Abraham Cowley*, 213.

² Cowley, *Complete works*. II 254-255.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 146.

9. FRANCIS OSBORNE, 1593-1659

We have seen that Cowley had been driven by the stress of religious conflict into an intense spiritual individualism that was tintured by a pervading scepticism. We have mentioned that religious indifference, strengthened by scepticism, was to be the fruit of the harsh conflict of rival systems of exclusive truth. The orthodox mind barely grasped the fact in 1660 that already a new and dangerous spirit was abroad in England which brought the troubled questions of divinity to a summary and final solution—by the simple persuasion that they did not matter. Heresy, error, and idolatry may be wrestled with, won, or destroyed, but the grim phantom of indifference offered no flesh to the spear of orthodoxy. We would not over-estimate the extent of indifference and scepticism in the England of 1660, but the evidence which we have been examining demonstrates that the stratum of this thought was vastly deepened as the Protectorate drew to its conclusion.

In the works of Francis Osborne¹ this temper, so destructive to orthodox pretensions, is almost suddenly revealed in all its steely sharpness. For Osborne attacked the orthodox, their pretensions and their persecutions, with new weapons against which zeal had no defence—ridicule, urbanity, and a complete denial of the axioms which men had long held as valid for their salvation. As we read Osborne after a long sojourn in what was truly a second age of faith we have the feeling that we have suddenly emerged into the light of a new era, into a new and strange climate of opinion. Many problems which appeared insoluble are suddenly resolved simply because they are ignored or approached from angles incomprehensible to the sixteenth

¹ Osborne, the youngest son of Sir John Osborne of Bedfordshire, was privately educated. He held a number of minor court offices prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. Though his sympathies were on the whole with the parliamentary cause, he persistently declined to participate in a struggle which did violence to his own moderate philosophy. Osborne removed to Oxford in 1650, where for some years he devoted himself to writing. The *Advice to a Son* was very popular amongst the undergraduates in the University and was condemned by the clergy of the city, who disliked its sceptical overtones. In 1658 the Vice-Chancellor of the University requested the booksellers to remove it from their shelves, with the natural result that its sale was greatly enhanced.

and to the early seventeenth centuries. Francis Osborne is no longer read, but he possessed a vigour and fearlessness of mind which the shattered nerves of England very badly needed. He was one of the most popular authors of the Restoration, his four principal works, published between 1652 and 1658, going through innumerable editions, while his collected works appeared in their seventh edition in 1673.

Osborne's thought was wholly sceptical while his attitude towards institutional religion was bluntly contemptuous. Men are bent into a particular frame of religion by custom, education, and ignorance. Humanity is habitual in its reactions and hence distrusts every variation from the normal pattern of behaviour. Persecution and suspicion flow from this tendency, which the state has been quick to canalize to its own advantage. For the magistrate gains strength from unity and accordingly maintains "those customs that appear useful, as relating to salvation . . . under a no less imperious an injunction than the command of God."¹ Hence persecution proceeds from powerful instincts of human nature which the wise man will not offend.

This realistic, if brutally sceptical, temper permeates Osborne's advice to his son, whom he urges not to undertake any quixotic crusades in the interests of true faith. Above all else the prudent man must avoid religious disputes "because that which commands in chief, though false and erroneous, will, like a cock on's own dunghill, line her arguments with force, and drive the stranger out of the pit with insignificant clamours. All opinions, not made natural by complexion, or imperious education, being equally ridiculous to those of contrary tenets."² In these questions of faith, in other words, we must respect power, not truth. The wise man will temper his discourse in religion by a "sceptick humour," "less offence being taken at doubters, than such as boldly undertake to determine."³ One should keep the lamps of his zeal well trimmed when he is confronted with unfamiliar or unpalatable doctrines. Such prudence is counselled by refinement at home, in a foreign

¹ Osborne, Francis, *Advice to a son. The second part* (L., 1658), in *The works of Francis Osborne, etc.* (L., 1673), 175.

² *Ibid.*, (L., 1655) in *Works*, 56.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, 57.

country by sheer good manners.¹ The feet of faith must walk discreetly and softly and, above all else, will avoid trespassing on the sacred preserves of the clergy. For these men have in their hands powerful weapons of revenge. Never, Osborne advised his son, "oppose any religion you find established, how ridiculous soever you apprehend it . . . none but the monster's own sword, can cut off the head of one universally received."²

Thus the sceptic gains safety and repose against the hot winds of zeal by the prudence and good temper which are the concomitants of his doubt. The orthodox, Osborne implies, are so preoccupied with the destruction of their enemies that the sceptic, whose speech is conciliatory and whose manners are above reproach, will be left in peace. He therefore counselled his son to approach the problem of religion, security having been gained by prudence, by the road of pure reason. Nothing which reason has not abundantly disclosed can be required of a new believer without the unlikely aid of a miracle.³ No man should be persuaded in religion beyond the light of his own reason. The Bible is so vague and has been so variously interpreted that no general truth can be said to be binding upon the individual. Every group that has so desired has warped the Bible to suit its own convenience. A wilderness of conflicting truths and grasping dogmatisms confronts the man who does not ignore them all. In this confusion of contention, Osborne observes, "we have no better guide to follow than reason, found the same for many thousands of years, though belief hath been observed to vary every age."⁴ Reason remains our only stay and balance-wheel. Above all we must be suspicious of the claims of revelation, which in its manifestation has ever been confined to persons and circumstances unrelated to normal human experience. Reason, on the contrary, "passeth in an universal commerce being of an unquestioned allay, and therefore likeliest to be the oracles of the everliving God . . . and so not improbably supposed to have measured out a way to heaven by her own line."⁵ Reason, Osborne pointed out, commands our belief whereas every other force begs it. All men, whether Christian or heathen, who follow its simple dictates

¹ Osborne, *Advice to a son*, *Works*, 58.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, 121.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, 117.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, 114.

⁵ *Ibid.*, *Works*, 115.

will surely be saved since God can in justice require no more than a reasonable faith and loyalty.

The weight of Osborne's arguments swept to conclusions startling to the seventeenth century. It is important to observe that he starts from no prior assumptions and will admit of no assumptions that have nothing to recommend them save authority and traditions. No faith that is not reasonable can be regarded as valid, nor can faith be certainly defined in terms larger than the individual man. Such a persuasion, he taught, leads men to embrace their peculiar religious opinions moderately, tolerantly, and, it may be, lightly.

The world, Osborne submitted, stands in need of nothing else quite as much as moderation. He confessed that he feared the wild opinions and the wilder zeal which had made a religious wilderness out of seventeenth-century England. Here we discover at once the source of his scepticism and the dynamic of his tolerance. For anarchy, he taught, following Hobbes, breeds tyranny and destruction. The prudent man will avoid intemperate zeal like the destroying plague. "Put no more of it on," he urged his son, than with decency you may divest, "in case the fashion should alter, and the rich die the wars have dipt it in, be rubbed off." The wise man gives himself as an hostage to no extremism. For he has observed that one century makes martyrs of those "the precedent thought hereticks."¹ Faith and zeal should always go forward under the tight reins of reason. For zeal all too easily gives way to an "over biased holiness" which endangers society and destroys the integrity of man. It is the most pernicious and dangerous of all the enemies of order and of civilization.

The Christian world needs, above all else, the perspective and proportion which a moderate temper affords to reasonable men. If we but withdraw a little, it becomes evident that religions differ but insubstantially from one another. It will be apparent, too, that men actually persecute each other for professing identical truths in different language.² The world has gone mad with an intemperate zeal. Vicious clergymen employ it to perpetuate their own vested interests, unscrupulous magistrates to enslave their people. All reason and moderation are

¹ Osborne, *Advice to a son*, *Works*, 109.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, 116.

consumed in a fury of insane fanaticism. Ceremonies and usages which can claim no nobler paternity than accident become established in habitual usage and are then defended as sacrosanct. Tradition enforces that which reason cannot fathom. Osborne confessed that he revered tradition, but "I cannot be of that spirit to contest for her (or against her) unto blood." Men can rescue themselves and the society of which they are an integral part only by shearing off the wings of zeal. They can gain safety only by embracing that moderate temper which glides quietly and easily through those rocks that loom so dangerously for the fanatical. "When you find yourself strike upon the rock of danger," he admonished his son, "cast obstinacy over board, and call wisdom to the helm."¹ From this counsel we may draw but one conclusion: faith is not worthy of its martyrs; religion and the institutions which it has reared cannot indefinitely be paid for by society in the coin of security and blood. The prudent man will bend before the storms of zeal, for the trunk of his faith is compounded of the resilient stuff of moderation and the roots of his religion lie matted and concealed in the strong soil of robust scepticism.

Osborne extended this same cool and critical analysis to the problem of persecution, which he repeatedly indicated was the most serious issue facing the Christian world. The Christian churches have invariably defined truth in terms of the dream of dominance. Every energy, therefore, has been disciplined towards the attainment of supremacy with the result that the pursuit of truth has been abandoned. Strife, war, and persecution have been the progeny of this arrogant temper which the clergy have so zealously nourished. Force and persecution first came to infect the Church, Osborne believed, when "the priests of old . . . first, for the princes sake, and after for their own, had, not only taught her the art of juggling, but made her so tetchey by the corroding doctrines they instill'd into mens consciences, upon the least worldly occasion, that brought their honour or profit under question."² In this manner clerical greed and secular ambition prostituted the

¹ Osborne, *Advice to a son. The second part, Works*, 192.

² Osborne, Francis, *Political reflections upon the government of the Turks, etc.* (L., 1656), in *Works*, 313.

Church to particular and partisan ends. But diversity in spiritual matters cannot so easily be controlled and ambition has recoiled upon itself. In point of fact the aims of persecution have not been realized; civil security has been laid in ruins and religious unity has been torn into fragments as the hard structure of an enforced conformity burst because of its own tightening rigidity.

Furthermore, the effects of persecution, which has always disgraced the Church, have been equally destructive to the substance of religion. We crucify Christ daily. We have drifted so far from the tolerance and charity which imbued Christ's teachings that the Church which bears His name parodies His Gospel. We may be sure that he who "can find the heart to stigmatize and whip his brother, for an error merely in judgement, would never have spared Peter or Paul, coming with no more visible authority than they had."¹ It would seem that the history of persecution, if we refuse to heed Christ's clear injunctions, would itself convince us that error cannot be destroyed by force. No man can be beaten into intellectual or spiritual submission.

Osborne would grant a complete liberty to all men and to all sects that worshipped peacefully. The state should in its own interest guarantee and enforce this freedom, confining its repression to those fanatical spirits that attack all those who differ from their jaundiced definition of faith. But even this salutary administration of tolerance should be carried out discreetly in order not to advertise violence in the act of its suppression. For the state treads on dangerous grounds when it punishes opinions held in conscience, even if those opinions must be disciplined in the interests of tolerance. The state should reflect that "the whip reforms not so much as he that endures it; but is taken as a triumph by the faction, increasing their animosity, if not their number; so that in effect it proves a punishment to none but the honest and tender-hearted of the people, who cannot choose but be scandalized, to see the image of God defaced, by cutting ears, and slitting noses."²

¹ Osborne, Francis, *Vindication of Luther* (L., 1656), in *Works*, 406.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, 406-407.

History confirms not only the destructive effects of religious persecution but the beneficent consequences which flow from an enlightened policy of toleration. The Turks have long since granted a complete liberty not only to the Christians but to dissenting and heretical Moslem groups.¹ The greatness and prosperity of Holland have been founded upon the toleration that has been extended to all peaceful communions. There has been but one exception in Dutch history: an intolerant effort was undertaken by the dominant group to extirpate the Arminian party with the consequence that the repressed group increased enormously in numbers, piety, and prestige. The great Elizabeth instinctively sensed the political wisdom of toleration as a policy of state, but she too permitted one flaw to develop in her administration. She was provoked to persecution by the fanaticism and eccentricity of the separatists. The dissenters were thereby driven out, giving to Holland a great increment of wealth and the most skilled wool workers in England. How much better it would have been, Osborne mused, to have offered them "an Amsterdam in England, some small city of refuge, over which her majesty might have set a discreet governour with a garison."² But even a wise sovereign thwarted her own political ends and accomplished less than nothing spiritually by the prosecution of this policy. For separatism spread in England and hardened in Holland against the day when it would rise with tumultuous strength to confound her royal successors.

Following the earlier contributions of Acontius, John Goodwin, and Roger Williams,³ Osborne completed the English repudiation of the classical theory of persecution, which for a full thousand years had clouded the history of Christianity and which in the modern world had resulted in social confusion, political anarchy, and the spoliation of faith. Osborne brought to his consideration a cool and incisive sanity which cut through the psychology of persecution with all of the steady sharpness of a surgeon's knife. His judgment was

¹ Osborne, *Political reflections, Works*, 312.

² Osborne, Francis, *Historical memoirs of the reigns of Queen Elisabeth and King James*, in *Works*, 452.

³ For Acontius's contribution *vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, I, 303-365; for the discussion of Goodwin and Williams, *vide ibid.*, III, 376-412, 472-506.

pragmatic and his conclusions were vitally related to the political and social facts of the seventeenth century. His argument was couched in the terms of reason and his conclusions were stamped with the powerful seal of social necessity. Osborne spoke with the voice of a new and powerful lay society which had discarded the essentials of orthodoxy and which demanded a settlement of the problem of diversity in accordance with what were conceived to be the requirements of the good life in the modern world.

Osborne turned, finally, to a discussion of the problem of toleration, strictly in its relation to the sects and rival orthodoxies of his own age. He evidently reflected upon these delicate questions from the point of view of the practical statesman faced with social disorganization flowing from the mistakes of his predecessors, who had been persuaded by the fanatical remonstrations of the orthodox to perpetuate their dominance by securing the extirpation of dissent. So complete has been the intolerance of the churches, so venomous their hatred, that no Christian Church is universally admitted to be a true Church in which salvation may be found. Every sect condemns every other and each strives for an exclusive dominance supported by a persecution that is universally ruinous. Each claims an infallible judgment, with the consequence that the world is treated to the amazing spectacle of a Christianity disrupted into innumerable and irreconcilable fragments.¹ The prince confronted with this situation should dissolve the hard core of schism and avert the awful potentialities of conflict by permitting all men freedom of worship under the tacit assumption that all sects are in reality true Churches. The limit of his constraint should be the repression of the overt manifestations of intolerance which, arising from sectarian zeal, may endanger his sovereignty.

As Osborne surveyed the chaotic religious scene in England during the late days of the Protectorate he discovered little indeed which either his charity or his sense of humour could not tolerate. He found the Socinians, who by the most tolerant standards were normally excluded from any discussion of liberty of worship, the "most chymical and rational" of all the

¹ Osborne, *Advice to a son. The second part, Works*, 244.

sects. Although they had unfortunately strayed far out of the main channel of Christian history, even the most orthodox and pious have much to learn from their rationalism, their sanity, and their wholly admirable tolerance. The Reformed Faith, he suggested, was probably best suited for England, though it has stripped itself too bare of decent ceremonies and is far "too cholerick and rigid in obtruding upon the weak and tender consciences." Indeed, a most excellent religion could be distilled out of Catholic charity, Puritan words, and the Protestant faith. Osborne found the Millenarians possessed of a "jovial creed" which can hardly be disproved from the formulations of the ante-Nicene Councils. He regarded the Levellers as offending the "Lord of Order" if not the "Lord of Faith," and properly to be regarded as a social menace delicately to be suppressed.¹ The Antinomians and others who proclaim a universal redemption should be regarded tolerantly—indeed it might in the fulness of infinite time prove imprudent not to do so. The Catholics presented no especial problem to Osborne's pragmatic intelligence. We shall be confounded indeed if they do not profess a true faith. The Roman Church is corrupt and it has an evil record of persecution, but, he implied, this could be controlled in a tolerant state. In fact, he suggested with wry irony, they should be most favourably regarded indeed if they stressed just a little more the teaching of purgatory, since the goblins there conjured up would have a most salutary effect upon the ignorant.

Never, we may believe, were the pretensions of orthodoxy and the objectives of persecution subjected to more withering ridicule and to such a clinical analysis as they received from the skilful hands of Francis Osborne. There must be no mistake. Osborne did not base his plea for toleration upon religious or political grounds. His was the conviction that proceeds to the solution of the problem of diversity from the unassailable position of indifference. Orthodoxy possesses no weapons with which to attack this disembodied wraith. The substance of faith stood amorphous in Osborne; the fires of zeal had been

¹ *Vide* Osborne, *Advice to a son, Works*, 105-107, for this amazing comparative study.

extinguished in his intellect. Osborne is important because he foreshadows in somewhat exaggerated relief the mentality of a large and rapidly expanding area of English thought. We may safely assume that articulate opinion at least had been convinced by a complex and slowly focusing body of reasons of the justice of the case of toleration; it was to be persuaded by the sharp and biting analysis of men like Osborne of its necessity.

10. MINOR THEORISTS

The body of rationalistic thought, sparse before 1640, became during the period of the Civil War widely dispersed, fearless in its criticism, and courageous in its defence of religious liberty. While almost naïvely confident that reason could disclose that knowledge of truth which faith had failed to reveal, the rationalists were in the very nature of their thought devoted to the principles of legal and intellectual tolerance. England had through a long and tragic era been torn and divided by faiths which demanded the absolute devotion of the human soul, which were prepared to sacrifice the body of society and the solidifying cohesion of the state to ideals that bore but slight relevancy to the realities of European life in the seventeenth century. The protests against these pretensions were strong in 1640, overwhelming in 1660. The intellectual basis of this protest was at first almost instinctive, since England in 1640 was unequipped with a theory of the state or a theory of religion which could meet successfully the plausible and traditional claims of an organic theory of society. The harsh fact was, however, that an organic society, which had begun to evidence serious fissures in the early sixteenth century, was in process of rapid dissolution by the middle of the seventeenth. A revolutionary adaptation in theory, by which we mean the pattern of men's thinking about the state and religion, was accordingly necessary in order to shape society to the stern but inescapable reality of historical change. Perhaps the most significant element in this adaptation was the evolution of the theory of toleration, for by it the vacuum created by the destruction of an organic

spiritual society could be filled by an accommodation which at once preserved society and permitted the survival of institutional religion upon chastened conditions of adaptation.

The rationalists made significant contributions to this process of historical accommodation. We have observed that they possessed the capacity to diagnose realistically the dynamic of historical and institutional change; that they possessed the courage to propose remedies which did grave violence to the traditional patterns of religious behaviour; that their thought possessed a shocking power which widened the fissures in orthodox theory. The thought of the rationalists was hard, brilliant, and inextricably fastened to principles which Cromwell's England dared not deny were sound. We have endeavoured to analyse the structure and to estimate the importance of this thought by a consideration of the works of some of the most original and powerful minds that seventeenth-century England was to produce. Even more significant is the evidence that as the historian quarries deeper into the thought of obscure men the vein of rationalism runs hard and clean through the tumbled strata of a new structure of thought heaved up by the explosive power of revolution.

Man's reason, the minor rationalists taught, must be insulated against the pressure of external forces which seek its perversion and enslavement. The rational capacity is a free gift of God, granted to man as the sole instrument for the attainment of truth and for the working out of his personal, intellectual, and spiritual salvation.¹ The sceptical John Fry²

¹ *Twelve weightie queries of great concernment, shewing in what cases the difference of mens judgements, and opinions in matters of religion, is not to be restrained but tolerated by the civill power* (L., 1646), 2-4.

² John Fry (1609-1657), who was generally regarded by his contemporaries as a Socinian (but see *Clarendon State Papers*, I, §2639 for instances of the loose use of the term), was a member of Parliament. He was suspended from the House of Commons in January, 1649, upon information accusing him of anti-Trinitarian beliefs. He vindicated himself against the libel in the next month and was reinstated. His *Accuser sham'd* (1649) and *The clergy in their colours* (1650) again provoked serious and justifiable doubts concerning his orthodoxy. On January 31, 1651, the former book, which evidenced not only vigorous anti-clerical sentiments but outright scepticism, was after a division on the question (45-35) read to the House. The growing anti-clericalism and unorthodoxy in Parliament was demonstrated when by a vote of 27-24 the House declined to condemn it as scandalous. Fry's works

wrote in 1651 that "every man that knows any thing, knows this . . . it is reason that distinguisheth a man from a beast; if you take away his reason, you deny him his very essence; therefore if any man will consent to give up his reason, I would as soon converse with a beast as with that man."¹ Man must jealously guard the integrity of his own intellect and must insist upon his natural right to arrive at conclusions in religion by the slow process of independent judgment. In particular, the chains which the clergy have laid upon freedom must be cast off if we are to recover the dignity of our manhood. We must stand prepared to submit our destiny to the light and guidance of our own reason and judgment.² For surely, another writer urged, no man can do more than seek truth with the aid of the light with which God has endowed him. Are such patient and rational men "to be judged, upbraided, censured, blamed, or much lesse punished, or put to death by others, who take themselves to be much more learned . . . than they?"³ For all too long the clear, pure flame of reason has been extinguished by the angry winds of persecution.

Men may adequately employ their reason only under conditions which leave it entirely free. It should be self-evident that the questions of religion should "be freely argued, debated, disputed amongst others differing from them; in order to finde out the full truth."⁴ Therefore any restraint imposed upon religion and intellectual liberty circumscribes the area of truth by a fallible delineation. Such restraint not only narrows the grace of God but inevitably destroys the very substance of religion. Mankind has blindly pursued the ghost of a dead uniformity. We should realize that diversity of opinion and worship arise simply because God has chosen to endow men with varying degrees of perception and capacity. It should

are only incidentally Socinian; they are in point of fact irreligious and bitterly anti-clerical. Fry deserves careful study, especially on the question of his influence and connections.

¹ Fry, John, *The clergy in their colours; or a brief character of them* (L., 1650), 42-43.

² Fry, John, *The accuser sham'd; or, a pair of bellows to blow off that dust cast upon John Fry, etc.* (L., 1649), 4, 9-10, 23.

³ *Twelve weightie queries*, 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

be apparent that any effort calculated to reduce these variations to a norm of definition has no other effect than to levy war upon the Spirit of God.¹ Restraint irremediably destroys the reasonable foundations of a vital faith and compels men to a profession devoid of all personality and sincerity. True religion can be advanced by no other means than spiritual persuasion and reasonable instruction. Certainly "Christ never mentioned any penalties to be inflicted on the bodies or purses of unbelievers, because of their unbelief." Every human being must in the end be judged by the quality, the integrity, and the rational character of his faith. Religion has no other basis than the inward consent of a reasonable understanding. And we may be sure that "the understanding is so free, that it is not in the power of men to compel it to, or restrain it from, a consent: nothing but the irresistible evidence of a truth can gain a consent, and when the evidence is clear to any man's understanding, he himself, much less another howsoever potent, cannot so much as suspend an assent."²

The rationalists were firm in their insistence that religion must be reduced to terms of individualism; that it must be freed from divers traditional and authoritarian pressures which conspired to rob it of its rational foundations. It is "indecorous and unworthy," the gentle Rust wrote, "of a Christian to draw in his religion with his mothers milk." It is unmanly for us to receive our religion by statutes rather than by the sound persuasion of reason, dangerous for us to submit our faith to the judgment of the learned, who strive to maintain and defend some "preconceived and prejudicate opinion."³ Every man, the Earl of Carbery wrote to his son, must strive to retain absolute independence in matters of faith. Labour diligently, he urged, to find the truth "when God shall inable you with abilities for that great worke, for I wold not have

¹ *Twelve weightie queries*, 5-6.

² *The Leveller or, The principles and maxims concerning government and religion, which are asserted by those that are commonly called Levellers, etc.* (L., 1659), in *The Harleian Miscellany: or, a collection of scarce, curious, and entertaining pamphlets and tracts . . . found in the late Earl of Oxford's Library, etc.* (L., 1744-1746), IV, 547.

³ Rust, George, *A discourse of the use of reason in matters of religion, etc.* (written in 1656), in *The remains of that reverend and learned prelate, Dr. George Rust, etc.* (ed. by Henry Hallywell) (L., 1686), 46.

you owe your religion to your education only.”¹ Diversity, error, and sectarianism may spring from religious freedom, but far more relevant is the fact that in an atmosphere of liberty the immense resources of truth will at last be unlocked. The enlightened mind will rest certain that “he who after an humble, pious, and attentive weighing of things shall yet fall into error, is upon better grounds to be judged if not worthy of praise, yet at least of pardon, then he that shall blindly and fortuitously assent, though to truth it self.”²

The rationalists were inspired by a high view of human nature and by a naïve faith in the capacity of the human reason that was destined to dominate the political thinking of the eighteenth century. In the sphere of religion their view contributed powerfully and decisively to the development of a larger and freer conception of faith and of religious institutions. At the same time, their sturdy devotion to the principles of religious liberty served to discredit and undermine the philosophy and practice of spiritual coercion. Furthermore, the blunt honesty and cool analysis typical of seventeenth-century rationalism was quite as beneficent in its influence in areas not closely related to religious toleration. One example must suffice. The rationalists attacked the prevalent horror of witchcraft with precisely those conclusions that were employed with such admirable effect against religious persecution.

Thus in 1641 Henry Oxinden, a country gentleman and a member of Parliament, wrote to the nephew of the Dean of Canterbury concerning a woman who was under indictment for witchcraft on the usual charges. Oxinden was a thorough rationalist. The “fables of witchcraft,” he wrote, are firmly rooted in silly men. The fear of witches arises from the blind fright of weak men who must create some symbol of their own fear. Hence powers and capacities not possessed by mortal men are bestowed upon unfortunate and helpless persons. “Surely the naturall power of any mortall creature is not of soe large extent as to doe things beyond the power and vertue given . . . by God. . . . Such mischeifs as these are imputed

¹ Vaughan, Richard, second earl of Carbery, *Letter of advice to his son* (1651), Ellesmere MSS. (Huntington Library), 34B2, f.2.

² Rust, *Discourse of the use of reason, Remains*, 46-47.

to witches hapned before she was borne and will happe when she is dead; why then shall such effect be atributed to that cause which being taken away will happen neverthelesse?"¹ The credulity and fathomless ignorance of humanity discovers its symbols and gains its barbarous expiation in the savage destruction of imaginary witches. The psychology which underlies this particular insanity is precisely that which has in the past been vented in the persecution of heretics.² Men, Oxinden implies, are afraid to employ the gift of reason; they have for so long been enslaved in a meaningless uniformity of belief and action that they persecute every evidence of peculiarity by a kind of gregarious instinct.

The irreconcilable religious divisions which harassed the nation, the peremptory demands of conflicting definitions of exclusive truth, and the intellectual ferment of revolution were in part at least responsible for the stimulation in England of an active and growing scepticism which was slowly sapping the foundations of orthodox thought. Men were tired of conflict and were increasingly suspicious of the pretensions of the clergy. In the words of a weary and embittered satirist:

"We're fourscore religions strong,
Take your choyce, the major voyce
Shall carry it right or wrong."³

The virus of scepticism or of outright unbelief had permeated many sections of English thought and was every day exhibiting itself in more conspicuous manifestations of action. What was most alarming to the orthodox was the fact that the Cromwellian government made a determined, an almost grim, effort to accommodate a type of heterodoxy hitherto unknown in English history within a broad conception of toleration.⁴

Thus in 1655 an extremist named Coppin, after various vicissitudes, was indicted before Justice Wilde at Worcester under a grand jury indictment of blasphemy. Coppin may have been a religious man, but by his own admission he was

¹ *Oxinden Letters, 1607-1642, etc.* (ed. by Dorothy Gardiner) (L., 1933), 222.

² *Ibid.*, 222-224.

³ *The Anarchie, or the blest reformation since 1640, etc.* (L., 1648), s.sh.

⁴ *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 144-253, for a full consideration of this policy.

Christian only in a vaguely reminiscent sense. He taught that all men will be saved and that Christ was a man, and denied that there would be a final judgment. Heaven and hell, he argued, are imaginary save as they exist within our own natures. The judge permitted Coppin to present his views fully to the jury, which promptly declared him guilty of the charges specified in the indictment. Wilde strained both the letter and the spirit of the *Blasphemy Act* in his decision that the case was not comprehended by the statute. He explained expertly, if sophistically, that Coppin did not, for example, completely deny the existence of heaven and hell since he admitted that both existed "in man" and "therefore doth not affirm there is none at all." Upon this ground he reversed the verdict and bound Coppin over.¹

Equally sceptical were the views of the Quakeress, Elizabeth Avery, who in a confused and mystical argument seemed to hold that the soul as an individual entity expires with the body.² As individuals, she submitted, men will not live again.³ Our hope of immortality does not extend beyond the possibility that we shall be merged with the spirit of God in a future life. Illustrations of this kind could be almost indefinitely multiplied during the period under consideration.⁴ These examples would apparently indicate that the traditional pattern of belief was cracking and dissolving under the strain of conflict and the ruinous demands of opposed loyalties. In particular, the *Weekly Intelligencer* complained, the harsh weight of Calvinistic theology was causing men to seek escape from its crushing logic. "The sad effect" of the "damned opinion of predestination" in the spiritual life of the nation was abundantly demonstrated, its editor indicated, by the case of one John Rogers, a native of Cornwall, who had killed

¹ Coppin, Richard, *Truths testimony; and a testimony of truths appearing, in power, life, light, and glory, etc.* (L., 1655), 43.

² Avery, Elizabeth, *Scripture-prophecies opened, which are to be accomplished in these last times, which do attend the second coming of Christ, etc.* (L., 1647), 37-38.

³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴ For a fuller discussion of the rise of scepticism during this and the earlier period (1603-1640), *vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 35-36, 47-51, 164-165, 421-424, 428, and III, 87-94, 135-136, 140-142, 174-176, *et passim*.

himself in the conviction that "if he was born to be damn'd, he should be damn'd; if to be saved, he should be saved."¹ Weak minds were in this age of momentous religious crisis unbalanced by the necessity for those reasonable decisions which a new liberty imposed upon them; strong minds, sickened by the spectacle of clerical pretensions and orthodox fury, sought refuge in a critical scepticism which denied with a forbidding assurance those principles that a previous generation had accepted as certainties, which subjected the intolerant claims of orthodoxy to that most conclusive of all denials—contempt.

The minor rationalists assailed the clergy with a vehemence which would indicate that they were in reality attacking institutional religion on its most exposed flank. England, they charged, was being ruined by a clerical leadership that was tainted with pride and fouled by intolerance.² These men have led their flocks into the valley of persecution and have inspired them with an impious hatred towards all who exhibit differences of judgment. As a result, "every one cherisheth his own babe that his braines hath travailed with and his hand brought forth."³ The line of difference has become the line of heresy.

The irrepressible Fry ridiculed the clergy for their strange postures in praying and preaching, declaring that he was convinced that "few men under heaven are more irrational in their religious exercises than our clergy are."⁴ What they want in piety and reason they supply in fanaticism and intolerance of judgment. They have fanned the fires of zeal in England and by their fevered prosecution of their own selfish ends have laid a nation in waste.⁵ They invest their authority with a kind of magical ritual, while they secure it by fraud and prostitution of reason.⁶ The clergy, a petition to Parliament alleged, seek to perpetuate their persecuting sway by riveting their power upon the nation with the steel of statute.

¹ *Weekly Intelligencer*, March 18, 1652.

² F., S., *A designe to save the kingdome*, etc. (L., 1647), 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴ Fry, *The clergy in their colours*, 36.

⁵ *Twelve queries humbly proposed to the consideration of the parliament and army*, etc. (L., 1659), 6-7.

⁶ Fry, *The clergy in their colours*, 41.

They endeavour to secure the establishment in England of "a very inquisition, to be as a curb to all those that oppose the doctrines and opinions of the ministers, or will not without reasonings and disputings submit their faith . . . to their wils."¹

There is a new tone evidenced in the anti-clericalism of the revolutionary period. It was not so much the dissatisfaction, common in England since the fifteenth century, with clerical prerogatives and corruption, as a distrust of the clerical vocation and a deep-seated hostility to the institutional foundations of their power. It would seem to be clear that these thinkers were striking at the Church through the clergy; that they sought not so much the reformation as the destruction of clerical leadership. The clergy had striven desperately to bind England in continued devotion to an organic conception of religious life by painting in somewhat exaggerated hues the perils which society would face if the bonds of ecclesiastical discipline should be relaxed. The clergy, the layman argued, sought to retain their ancient authority over conscience by calling up once more the phantom of heresy. This issue and this challenge the rationalists faced squarely and honestly.

One writer suggested that there would always be heresy which, it has been amply demonstrated, persecution will never be able to control or heal. Its correction can be achieved by no other means than by "suffering truth (by its own power and evidence) to gain ground by degrees upon the understandings and consciences of mens."² Another bold thinker argued the amazing thesis that heresy can be accurately charged only against those who deny the existence of God, and since no one in England denies Him, it cannot truthfully be said to exist. Heresy is an invention of the deranged mind of an intolerant clergy, who want nothing else so much as "to keep men in awe and feare of affrunting them in their arguments . . . and to beget in men a superstitious beliefe of any thing they say, without an examination of their grounds and reasons."³ Surely it is better to convince a man reasonably of his delusions

¹ *A demurre to the bill for preventing the growth and spreading of heresie, etc.* (L., 1646), 1.

² *The true magistrate or the magistrates duty, and power in matters of religion, etc.* (L., 1659), 11.

³ *A demurre to the bill*, 3.

than to seal the darkness of his understanding by putting him to death. No human being can predict when the understanding of another will be illumined. We may be sure that God's truth is abundantly able to defend itself; we best preserve for all men the possibility of finding it when we provide for them complete liberty in their search. No spiritual error, no eccentricity of faith, this interesting writer pleaded, can be so grievous as to constitute a sufficient reason for depriving a man of his life or rational freedom. There is, in point of fact, no authority for the punishing of men who deny even the existence of God. "The Apostles way was to make the unknowne God, to be knowne to ignorant men; to remove errours by the sword of the spirit and the soundness of argument; not by punishment or death." God sent His servants abroad in a hostile and pagan world with no weapons save those of the spirit. He declared it His purpose "to convince, not to compell, to conquer the understanding by the glorious and shining brightnesse of truth; and not subdue it by force of armes, by fire and faggot, by the hatchet or halter."¹ Christ allowed to all men a perfect freedom. He raised the arms of force against no heresy and molested no form of false worship.

The persecution of heresy, then, is derived not from the teachings of Christ but from the cupidity of impious spirits who have organized and directed it towards the attainment of private ends. Heresy has been carefully defined by each church in such wise as to secure the extirpation of those sects which it fears. A system of persecution has been erected which is posited upon the hideous assumption that the prerogative of judgment in religious questions is an automatic derivative of political dominance. This is to make truth a relative and ephemeral matter since "those tenets which are now accounted heresies, may be in the countenanced truthes of the next age."² Truth prospers and unfolds only in the warm and fruitful climate of freedom. Every man and every society must be vigilant against the designs of those imperious spirits who endeavour by wile to ensnare truth in the nets which they pretend to cast out for non-existent heresy.

Persecution, it must be admitted, does not accomplish its

¹ *A demurre to the bill*, 4.

² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

announced purpose of overcoming heresy. But this is not the chief accusation which may be laid against it. For though persecution may be undertaken in the name of religion it can have no other effect than the destruction of faith. Reason, understanding, and truth wither before its hot breath. Persecution serves no holy end whether it forces men into the confines of a false church or compels them to the formal acceptance of a true one. History cannot recount the misery, blood, and war that have followed in the train of persecution. So it must be to the world's end "if difference in opinions about religious worship and matters of faith, should be admitted" to be a sufficient ground for strife.¹

Persecution ensures nothing in religion save the dominance of that faction armed with the most brutal sword. The intolerant spirit seems to flow naturally from the institutional status which sects that formerly pleaded for liberty occasionally attain. Typically, a sect gains in strength by preaching, sound argument, and spiritual example until it is in turn entrapped by the vision of dominance and the dream of power. This, one rationalist submitted, had been the history of Puritanism in England.² A sect that only yesterday pleaded eloquently the cause of liberty now imposes its will upon the magistrate and laity alike. In so doing it forswears Christ, who employed no other weapon in His warfare than reasonable persuasion. The writer warned the Presbyterians that they plotted a conformity which "layes hold but upon the body and is the road way to make hypocrites, such as out of feare, or other outward and low respects, will happily conform; the guilt of whose dissimulation, must necessarily be put upon your scoars who occasion it."³ They arrogantly taunt men who, they allege, have not yet found their high peak of truth and who accordingly cannot "see with their eyes."⁴ They resolve to destroy the weak and lost upon whom the apostles bestowed the gentlest care and regard. These dangerous spirits have raised up in England such a "bloody bitterness of pro-

¹ *The Leveller, Harleian Miscellany*, IV, 548.

² [Gibbon, Nicholas], *The reconciler. Earnestly endeavouring to unite in sincere affection, the presbyters and their dissenting brethren of all sorts, etc.* (L., 1646), 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴ F., S., *Designe to save the kingdome*, 9-10.

fessors one towards another, that instead of applying balme to one anothers wounds, they are ready to breake the bones of each other.”¹ These men are the avowed enemies both of civilized life and of all religion founded upon truth and charity.

The fury of the persecuting church, another writer suggested, recoils on itself. When one sect seeks dominance with the sword it forces all other groups into a defensive coalition founded upon common support of the theory of toleration. The Presbyterians will do well indeed if they content themselves with the quiet enjoyment of their own freedom, leaving undisturbed all men who worship soberly and quietly.² They will erect their church upon much firmer ground if they labour for Christian unity “by courses more civill, ingenious, and gospellary, and in process of time no lesse effectuall.”³ Those whose zeal threatens to break out into a rage of persecution should reflect that those who take up the sword will perish by the sword. Another rationalist solemnly warned the Presbyterians that the wisest course for “them that are in respect and favour, is to carrie themselves friendly towards their brethren; otherwise if ever the tide turns, men will rejoyce at their downfall.” That sect which endeavours to establish its dominion in England by the means of persecution misreads history and defiles an omnipotent and just God. Can they forget that the Catholics counted themselves secure when they “had fire and fagot at will to burne up those whom they accounted heretiques”? Can they forget the fate of Anglicanism, which perished upon the sword that it had drawn for the extirpation of its enemies? Even those whose spirit is inflexible, whose temper is intolerant, must recall that though force has engendered wars and persecution it has never wrought an enduring uniformity, much less a Christian unity.⁴

The minor rationalists defended with fervour and with some originality the religious liberty which they declared to be essential for the restoration of civil and spiritual peace in England. The nation should bow its head in shame in memory

¹ F., S., *Designe to save the kingdome*, 11.

² [Gibbon], *The reconciler*, 12.

³ [Constantine, William], *The interest of England, how it consists in unity of the Protestant religion, etc.* (L., 1642), 10.

⁴ [Gibbon], *The reconciler*, 13.

of the bitterness and strife which have characterized the sects. "For thy religion," the Earl of Carbery wrote his son, "distinguish not thy selfe by, be not factious for, nor serve under any sect whatsoever."¹ Each faction has sought to ensure its own predominance by coercive measures, to the undoing of all. The Christian Churches have apparently forgotten that religion is "either infused into our understandings by God, or necessarily begotten in us through the bent and inevitable determination of our reasons, and so neither way liable to the controule of man."² Religious coercion is consequently as futile as it is criminal. England is torn by irreconcilable feuds between numerous religious groups each of which strives for exclusive mastery. Each faction displays the insecurity of its position and the essential weakness of its hold upon Christian men by grasping those weapons which anger and fear supply.³ Intolerance is born of insecurity, persecution of fear. Thus the sects have dedicated themselves to the stubborn retention of preconceived positions rather than to the free and honest pursuit of truth. All sense of proportion, all realization of essential unity have been lost in a mad race for power.⁴ This impious and destructive warfare of the sects, which has reached a horrible *crescendo* in England, can be alleviated only by the extension of a universal liberty of conscience.

All men and all sects, another writer urged, must be brought by the legal enforcement of toleration to the realization that we possess no instrument for the propagation of the gospel save the spiritual sword, and that no sect dares arrogate to itself the mantle of infallibility. Tolerance unleashes the spiritual resources of the Church and permits it freely to employ those curatives which are alone specifics for the correction of error. All men plead for a universal toleration save those who for the moment enjoy the prerogatives of dominance. The only arguments ever advanced in the interests of the repression of diversity flow, in other words, from the fact of temporal power rather than from the persuasion of spiritual

¹ Carbery, *Letter of advice to his son*, Ellesmere MSS. (Huntington Library), 34B2, f.2.

² [Gibbon], *The reconciler*, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

conviction.¹ Only those men who enjoy control over the magistrate discover any connection between the faith of Christ and the secular responsibilities of the prince. The magistrate, one writer observed, should stand aloof from any association with the Church. His is the task of enforcing law and of administering the toleration so necessary for the vitality of religion. He should exercise scrupulous care "not to side, or engage with any party, or opinion, whereby the ballanc is cast to favour one judgement more then anothers."² He should realize that his civil sovereignty is invaded when his courts, his armies, and his power are prostituted to the prosecution of the ruthless ambition of one faction to master all other groups in the nation. Without passion, without any religious commitments whatsoever the good state confines its role in religion to the protection of all consciences and to the maintenance of the fabric of religious freedom. The state should clearly and finally indicate its complete divorcement from the quest of its citizens for truth. For the power of the civil ruler is wholly derived from the people. Since it is evident that the people do not, and never did, enjoy the power infallibly to determine religious truth, it follows that no such power is vested in the magistrate.³

The diversity of judgment and the variety of worship which religious toleration admits as a natural and spiritual right are not, despite the hysterical warnings of the orthodox, in any sense inimical to true faith. The structure of faith is complex and man has not proceeded far in his feeble efforts to delineate its circumference. The varieties of profession which at first sight seem to fracture truth into fragments are in reality all necessary to the completion of the pattern of a body of truth far larger and far more complex than bigoted minds can conceive.⁴ All men who are searchers after truth, however much they may differ in their judgment, are bound by an

¹ [Stubbe, Henry], *A vindication of . . . Sir Henry Vane, from the lyes and calumnies of Mr. Richard Baxter, etc.* (L., 1659), 13-14. This work has been most uncertainly attributed to Henry Stubbe, the younger, whose thought has been principally considered in a later section of this volume. *Vide post*, 335-340, for a more complete analysis of his contribution.

² *The true magistrate*, 6-7.

³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴ *Twelve weightie queries*, 6-7.

indissoluble spiritual unity in the worship of the same God. God has bestowed "differing measures of light and knowledge . . . that we may learn condiscention, and not to impose upon our brethren, but wait God's time of discovering to others what is already made known to us."¹ Men have by God's own wisdom been blessed with different talents and with an infinite complexity of understandings. Hence if faith is to be sincere, it "must necessarily and unavoidably differ, according to the different root of light upon which it grows. Surely babes in Christ and strong men, differ much in their apprehensions and comprehensions of the objects of faith, and much more those that are not yet born in Christ, though appointed unto regeneration."² An unconditional religious liberty is consequently the spiritual right and necessity of every human being, as a spiritual man if he is a Christian, as a reasonable man if he is not.³ Within the frame of this liberty alone can man be certain of his salvation and can the Church dedicate itself to the attainment of the Kingdom of God.

The secular benefits which will be derived from legally ensured religious liberty are second only to the infinite spiritual blessings which flow from it, the rationalists contended. It must be evident to all fair-minded men that no religious uniformity exists in England or is likely soon to be gained. Truly religious men agree that such unity, though ultimately desirable, cannot be attained save in an environment of complete liberty. The incendiaries most dangerous to the state and to religion as well are those who would employ the civil sword in a desperate effort to compel men to a uniformity to which they are persuaded neither by reason nor by faith. Such fanaticisms invade both the civil sphere and the realm of the spirit. The simple fact is, so violent are the passions excited by religion that the guarantee of religious freedom has become the necessary condition of civil peace. The gravest duty of the magistrate in England is to keep "these nations in peace, and hinder godly men of different judgements from supplanting one another by force and violence."⁴ Religious

¹ *The true magistrate*, 12.

² *The Leveller, Harleian Miscellany*, IV, 548.

³ *Twelve weightie queries*, 7.

⁴ [Stubbe], *Vindication of . . . Sir Henry Vane*, 16.

toleration alone, in the modern world at least, preserves intact the essence of sovereignty. For it imposes the conditions whereby faction is rendered impotent and violence driven from the realm of religious discussion. Toleration alone is consistent "with the unity, peace, safety, and prosperity of any state, or nation, under what form of civil government soever."¹ And, finally, religious liberty provides the most certain guarantee against forcible mutations of government, since it removes from the sphere of politics the most dangerous of all human emotions,—the conscience rendered desperate by violation and crucifixion.

We may say, in summary, that the rationalists had introduced a new temper into the discussion of the complex problems that underlie the development of religious liberty. They approached the consideration of the question of religion with an objectivity possible to men who were bound by no sectarian allegiance because they had disowned the institutional conception of the Church; they wisely shifted the discussion of the problem of religious liberty to pragmatic grounds that found adequate support in historical fact and political necessity. The pleas of the rationalists were unanswerable in an age that had discovered that social unity may be sacrificed in the pursuit of a religious unity no longer attainable because of the ugly fact of irreparable and ineradicable divisions. It may be suggested that these thinkers had discarded, save for a few vestigial survivals of terminology, without reservation or much evidence of nostalgia an organic conception of religious society which had hitherto never been absent from religious thinking, whether Catholic or Protestant. They were harbingers of a new age, who called men to the sharp realization of the fact that postulates which may have virtue, if not efficacy, in one age may easily be suicidal when applied under radically different historical conditions. These writers demanded religious liberty on grounds which, while including the entire scope of sectarian and philosophical pleading, added powerful reasons that embraced the point of view of a lay society which stood ready to write the history of human development in terms and achievements that broke sharply with the past. Natural right was

¹ *Twelve weightie queries*, 8.

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added to religious right; political necessity buttressed the claims of evangelical necessity; the plea of economic prosperity was joined with that of spiritual vitality in the sweeping vindication which these men gave to the case of religious toleration. It may truly be said that the rationalists brought into burning focus the diverse rays of argument which thoughtful men, great and obscure, pious and anarchistic, had through a full century been slowly, painfully, and separately fashioning.

E. THE ERASTIANS

I. GENERAL NATURE OF ERASTIAN THOUGHT

We have previously traced with some care the development of Erastianism in the religious and political thought of England.¹ We have observed that the Elizabethan Establishment was, both in the nature of the settlement achieved and in the methods by which it was sustained, deeply imbued with an Erastian spirit. Men of a moderate temper found in the comparative disinterest and the careful restraint of the state the best guarantee of a comprehensive and liberal religious order. We may believe that this tradition, which Elizabeth in the sphere of administration and apologists like Hooker and Whitgift in the area of thought so carefully defined, gained an amazing stability and acquired a tenacious vitality because it was proved on the great stage of history that a nation might thereby achieve peace in a world torn by the most tragic of all divisive forces. The triumph of Erastianism in England presumed in fact, if not in theory, that mastery of the vigorous and explosive forces of religion had been surrendered to the state. But it was a surrender which entailed at least a tacit contract under which the state was by assumption to order religion in the general interest, to restrain only the errant wings of fanaticism on either side of a comprehensive religious settlement, and to dedicate itself scrupulously to the main-

¹ Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, I, 20, 184-185, 231, 262-263, 364-365; II, 121-129, 453-491, *et passim*; III, 44-95, 270-271, *et passim*.

tenance of peace and order rather than to the prosecution of any particular and narrowly conceived "truth."¹

It may be held that Charles I precipitated an irreconcilable religious struggle when he violated the terms and spirit of the Elizabethan Settlement. For surely he surrendered to bigoted and determined hands a tremendous aggregate of power which Laud and his supporters employed in a desperate effort to narrow the comprehensive limits of the Church and to extirpate areas of dissent which, though extremely powerful, were by no valid judgment dangerous or fanatical. But Laud made those extremisms both dangerous and fanatical. Erastianism was indeed a two-edged sword. For a brief season the moderates and the anti-clericals were driven by the fury of Laudian Erastianism into other camps. But during the Civil War Erastianism developed rapidly along lines of thought and policy strikingly similar to those expounded so ably by the Elizabethan statesmen and theologians. These later Erastians rested their case upon sound historical precedents which were expanded to the limits that a frightened and somewhat weary lay intelligence found itself obliged to impose upon the explosive forces inherent in religion.

We have dealt at length with the Erastian leadership in the Long Parliament—a leadership brilliant in its tactics, unscrupulous in its alliances, and unswerving in its objectives throughout a confused period. These astute lawyers and squires first allied themselves with an amorphous Puritanism to secure the destruction of Episcopacy, though the price of this achievement was an almost tacit assumption that Presbyterianism would succeed Episcopacy. The first objective having been attained, the parliamentary Erastians cast out new lines of

¹ Mr. E. A. Whitney's recent article on *Erastianism and Divine Right* (*Huntington Library Quarterly*, II, 4 [July, 1939]) lends thoughtful attention to the striking transformation of Erastian thought just prior to the accession of Elizabeth. Mr. Whitney suggests that English Erastianism, having developed from the doctrine of unlimited obedience, underwent a substantial enlargement which enabled the Church of England to meet the "menace of the Council of Trent on the one hand" and the threat of Puritanism on the other. It is perhaps not too much to say that Elizabeth and the theorists who framed the philosophical defence of her Establishment transformed Erastianism into an instrument effective for the exploitation and defence of the lay power which undergirded the Elizabethan Settlement of Religion.

alliance to secure the impotency of Presbyterianism and to gain as large a measure of religious freedom as was possible without completely disrupting the parliamentary coalition. In all this sinuous trail of policy the dominating genius of John Selden is evident, a man "not overloving of any, and least of all" of Presbyterian clergymen;¹ a man who visited the Assembly of Divines "to see the wild asses fight,"² who delighted himself "in raising of scruples for the vexing of others," and in the confounding of the divines by his matchless knowledge of their own learning and vernacular.³

Under his leadership an able and skilful group, principally composed of lawyers, sought and gained the balance of power in the House in order to ensure a secular and moderate settlement of religion. These men, according to that symbol of Calvinistic orthodoxy, Baylie, perpetrated an ecclesiastical settlement without the heart of discipline, without the sinews of compulsion, and without the blood of an exactly defined doctrinal constitution.⁴ They proceeded with cold calculation to claim for Parliament the ecclesiastical power which Presbyterianism had of necessity to cede to the magistrate in order to arm its own intolerance, and then, with full appreciation of the irony involved, to employ a conceded sovereignty for the destruction of the possibility of bigotry. These men displayed the bitter dislike for the clergy which Clarendon observed was as early as 1641 characteristic of most lawyers who, he wrote, sought to "whet and sharpen the edge of the law to wound the Church in its jurisdiction, and at last to cut it up by the roots, and demolish its foundations."⁵ The Erastians in Parliament delivered into the hands of Oliver

¹ Fuller, Thomas, *The church history of Britain; from the birth of Jesus Christ until the year M.DC.XLVIII* (ed. by J. S. Brewer) (Oxford, 1845), VI, 286.

² *Harleian Miscellany*, V, 99.

³ We have discussed the thought and policy of this masterly Parliamentarian in earlier volumes; *vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 479-488; III, 55, 67-69, 103. Baylie recognized Selden as the undoubted leader of the brilliant group of lawyers and others in the House of Commons who were devoted to the Erastian conception of a church, moderately constituted, which should be firmly subjected to lay control. (Baylie, *Letters and journals*, II, 277, 307, 312.)

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 318.

⁵ Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion*, IV, 38.

Cromwell and the army a still malleable religious settlement, a mature and expanded conception of religious toleration, and the powerful support of an intelligent and influential group that had concluded that civil order and religious peace were more important than the further pursuit of the phantom of religious uniformity.

This review of the historical and parliamentary background of English Erastianism, which has been fully discussed in earlier volumes of this work, forms the frame in which the Erastian thought of the revolutionary era was couched, forms the core of political reality which the theorists were to confirm by their speculations. Something of the hardness, the calculation, and the contemptuous anti-clericalism of Selden and his allies is to be found in the writings of all the Erastian theorists. These men were the personification of the lay temper—a temper concerned rather with the realities of this world than with the contemplation of the Kingdom of God. These were men who saw clearly that unrestrained enthusiasm, sectarian warfare, and religion armed with the sword of sovereignty can have no other consequence than the dissolution of the state and the destruction of civilization. Only one aggregate of power, the state, can be interposed between the warring orthodoxies, and its interest in the preservation of peace and order imposes the necessity of religious toleration. The Erastians were concerned with the fate of the state; they were wholly careless of the fate of the Church. They contributed vastly, perhaps decisively, to the triumph of religious liberty, which historically was the negative by-product of insistence that the state must dissociate itself from any positive commitments in religion. Unhappily, so grave was their concern, so deep their distrust of the mentality and the civic morality of the clergy, that they armed the state with vast, almost illimitable powers. These men determined finally the long struggle between the temporal and spiritual authorities for the loyalty and obedience of mankind—a struggle which has moulded the character of western civilization—by ceding to the state not only those areas which Maitland denominated the disputed frontiers of jurisdiction, but the spiritual sphere as well. It may have been that in creating a Leviathan for the

reduction of one festering evil they created a new and a greater evil. Erastianism, truly, is a two-edged sword.

2. HENRY PARKER, 1604-1652

Writing almost a decade before the appearance of Hobbes's most influential works, Henry Parker anticipated with startling freshness and vigour much of the thought of his greater contemporary.¹ Parker at the very outset of the Civil War laid a broad and stable basis in political theory for the parliamentary cause by placing the weight of sovereignty in Parliament—this at a time when better-known thinkers were fumbling with the implications of a revolution which they disliked to call a revolution. Certainly it may be said that Parker viewed the religious problem with a naked Erastianism almost unique in seventeenth-century thought. As Mr. Allen has remarked, his writings were characterized by coolness of statement and vigour of argument.² Parker likewise made important contributions to economic theory, and it is in his economic tracts that we may discover the dynamic underlying his political and religious thinking. Parker was the spokesman for a powerful merchant group which had learned tolerance through its association with

¹ Parker was the fourth son of Sir Nicholas Parker of Hatton, Sussex, and Catharine, daughter of Sir John Temple, of Stow, Buckinghamshire. (Temple Papers, Huntington Library.) He was educated at Oxford, where he was graduated B.A. in 1625 and M.A. in 1628. Parker was called to the bar in 1637. Perhaps the earliest exponent of the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty (Judson, M.A., *Henry Parker and the Theory of Parliamentary Sovereignty*, in *Essays in History and Political Theory in Honor of Charles Howard McIlwain* [Cambridge (Mass.), 1936]), Parker gave strong support to the radical Puritan bloc during the early years of the Civil War. He was appointed Secretary to the Army under Essex in 1642 and a few years later, as a secretary to the House of Commons, assisted in the preparation of charges against the king. Parker, who, shortly after the Assembly had convened, denounced the Presbyterian ecclesiastical pretensions as dangerous to political and religious liberty, was until his death one of the most courageous and able of the exponents of religious liberty. He removed to Hamburg in 1646 where he served the Merchant Adventurers as secretary and Parliament as a political representative. (*S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, 1649-1650, pp. 34-35, 185.) Shortly after his return to London in 1649 he joined the army in Ireland as secretary, serving there until his death in 1652. (*S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, xxxii, 46; lxxi, 50.)

² Allen, J. W., *History of Political Thought, 1603-1644* (L., 1938), 339.

many cultures and religions, which was coming to measure politics and to estimate political institutions in terms of class interests, and which viewed with avowed suspicion the over-zealous leadership of the clergy. These men were far more interested in the order and security which a strong state can maintain than in the legality of its antecedents. In the same sense they demanded religious toleration, not as a positive good or because it favoured trade, but because persecution and religious strife endangered that security and free intercourse necessary to the successful prosecution of commerce, whether domestic or international. Hence Parker's capacious talents were disciplined by a pragmatic and thoroughly objective view of the problems which so harassed his generation. His biting logic cut through the myths and symbols with which men had so long enshrouded their political and religious actions to reveal their bankruptcy in the face of the harsh realities of seventeenth-century life.

We feel the weight of a hard, keen, and honest mind when we examine any aspect of Parker's thought. Thus in his consideration of the question of church government he moves with easy logic to inescapable and distasteful conclusions. Englishmen, at least, he submits, hold that no particular form of church government has been specifically ordained by the Bible. It seems probable that episcopacy is a better, an older, and a purer frame of government than some others,¹ but this by no means proves that it is the necessary form. For ecclesiastical government has but one end: the maintenance of discipline and order. This function may in fact be executed quite as efficiently by the secular courts as by the episcopal. Episcopacy, and other forms of church government as well, can argue the precedents of antiquity. But this likewise proves less than nothing because these were forms into which the primitive Church was pressed by the persecution of hostile civil states. The clerical demands for an independent church government, their vain endeavours to prove a divine prescription of government, are in fact nothing less than an effort to

¹ [Parker, Henry], *The Trojan horse of the presbyteriall government unbowedled, etc.* ([L.], 1646), 16, 21-22. The writer clearly favoured a limited episcopacy to a Presbyterian government.

invade the sovereignty of the state, and in that sense are rebellious.¹ The magistrate must be supreme in all causes since sovereignty is indivisible; when this is not true, sovereignty has been lodged elsewhere than in the titular ruler.² Hence it follows that church government must be disposed by the convenience of the state in the interests of order and decency.

Parker was darkly hostile to all ecclesiastical pretences which would loosen the Church from the firm and pragmatic control of the state. The intemperate zeal and the disorderly intolerance of the sects offer grave threat not only to liberty and moderation but to the fact of sovereignty as well. Every religious sect endeavours to gain power by means and for objectives which must be denounced as seditious.³ Thus Rome enjoyed dominion over all men during the Middle Ages, while Calvin, in so far as he dared, reposed ecclesiastical control in clerical hands.⁴ In England this ecclesiastical pretension has been finally concentrated in Presbyterianism, which, Parker wrote in 1646, "is pernicious to civill power, grievous to such as must live under it, and apt to disturb the common peace."⁵ The Presbyterians ostensibly seek an alliance with the civil power for the prosecution of religious objectives, but it is an alliance in which they predominate and which therefore destroys the substance of sovereignty.⁶ Invading the very heart of the functions of government, they arrogate to themselves the right to order the magistrate to approve this, to condemn that, and to extirpate what they shall define as heresy, blasphemy, and error.⁷ They seek, in brief, to subdue government to their wills and to impose a dangerous sovereignty over a nation. "By their lawes they make such things punishable, as wil leave no man in safety with whom they have a mind to quarrel. If a man conforme not his words, his gestures, his

¹ Parker was intense in his anti-clericalism. He accused the Puritan clergy of sedition, of complete intolerance, and of a deliberate plot to grasp the reins of power. England already senses an hostile intolerance, but that "which yet appeares is but the lions paw: his whole body is not yet seen . . . but lies lurking . . . in the registers of their assemblies and sessions never yet published to the world." (*Trojan horse*, 20.)

² [Parker], H[enry], *The true grounds of ecclesiasticall regiment: set forth in a breife dissertation, etc.* (L., 1641), 23-24.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵ [Parker], *Trojan horse*, 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

expences, his diet, his apparell to their liking . . . they convent him, and admonish him, and if he obey not their admonitions, they thunder out the sentence of excommunication against him.”¹ England should entertain no delusions about the ultimate intention of this distillation of all clerical arrogance. For these men mask rebellion in the honeyed tones of scripture; they would lay in waste the tolerance and moderation which civil government has gradually imposed upon a feverish and destructive zeal.

From this position Parker undertook to establish an Erastian solution to the religious problems of the seventeenth century that was unmitigated in its conclusions. His thesis gained peculiar credence in his age since he skilfully employed for the attainment of revolutionary conclusions the traditional medieval arguments which had fastened religious responsibility upon the prince. But Parker’s prince was master, not nursing father, of the Church. The coercive power of the magistrate, he maintained, since it is grounded upon the common consent of mankind, is absolute. The Church, on the other hand, enjoys no right of command, has developed from different roots, and possesses no coercive capacity by the definition of its own Creator. The priests have endeavoured to fabricate a coercive authority from nothing, but the “mere noise of an imaginary spiritual power and sword must not deceive us.” The priests argue to their own convenience, deny to one sect that which they claim for another, and create and destroy power as if by magical incantation. Thus the Protestants vehemently deny the power which the Church did exercise by usurpation in the Middle Ages, while seeking to create *de novo* a coercive jurisdiction quite as illegal and immoral.² Sovereignty, it must be insisted, is indivisible. As the divines have themselves conveniently proved by the clear precedents of the Hebrew kings, the authority of the civil magistrate is complete, whether in civil or in so-called spiritual matters.³ For the civil state enjoys by common consent an indisputable and *de jure* right of coercion. It accordingly possesses an exclusive right to command whether in civil or religious

¹ [Parker], *Trojan horse*, 19.

² [Parker], *True grounds of ecclesiasticall regiment*, 25–26.

³ *Ibid.*, 26–27.

matters. Hence all problems of order, of well-being, and of property fall within its purview, whether the state concerns itself with religion or the price of wool and leather.¹

For centuries Europe was torn and distracted by a struggle for sovereignty between weak secular rulers and a church which sought power for ends quite unconnected with its spiritual mission. Only slowly has the civil state gained a mastery which promises security to all men, prosperity to the nations, and peace to the world. Bluntly stated, the Church must be brought squarely and completely within the control of the state. For the requirements of sovereignty cannot be evaded. This may be neatly demonstrated by a consideration of the Elizabethan Settlement. Was the queen's power subordinate, coordinate, or superior to the power of her bishops? "If it was subordinate, she was in danger of deposition, and was to be ordered, and limited, and commanded by her superior. If her power was coordinate; she had no more power over her equall, than her equall over her; and it being as lawfull for her equall to counter-mand, as it was for her to command."² Sovereignty, in other words, has to be lodged somewhere and no subtle shifts and evasions can alter the fact that the Elizabethan Settlement vested it in the magistrate.

The Church, then, possesses no power of compulsion. This prerogative is vested exclusively in the state which may use it either for civil or for spiritual ends. Though we may not find this fact agreeable, the magistrate may force and has forced men in conscience. He would deny history who would assert that the faith of Scotland, Holland, Bohemia, and England was not changed in a very short time and without much trouble by the bald fact of a sovereign decision.³ Furthermore, this reformation really decided the question of sovereignty. In England, without any doubt, absolute control of religion was placed in the hands of the Parliament which changed the religion of the nation. This "is the same body of men now, of which both state and church are compacted;" the broken strands of sovereignty have again been united.⁴

¹ [Parker], *True grounds of ecclesiasticall regiment*, 88.

² *Ibid.*, 53.

³ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴ P[arker], H[enry], *The question concerning the divine right of episcopacie truly stated* (L., 1641), 3-4.

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Control of the explosive and volatile emotions excited by religion has at last been gained by the state, which will discipline them carefully, moderately, and wisely in order to gain a greater tolerance and a more stable security for all men. For the state will be discreet, it will be guided by the powerful instinct of expediency and the compelling desire to preserve its own essence of sovereignty. We may be sure that "authority itself hath not so rigorous a sway over the soules of men, as to obtrude disliked religions universally; it must persuade as well as compell, and convince, as well as command."¹ Religion now, as in the golden days of Constantine, has been reposed in the sure, firm hands of a lay power which is moved neither by the insanity of zeal nor by the eccentric visions of revelation.² We may expect that religion thus disciplined will lend itself once more to the fruitful development of civilization and to the attainment of a larger and nobler life.

The sharp clarity of Parker's Erastianism and the wrathful sweep of his anti-clericalism stand unique in English political theory. Parker said in effect that the English Parliament had concluded a reformation which by the very title of its paternity placed the Church strictly within the administration of the state. Nor was Parliament's capacity confined to the cleansing of corruptions and the ordering of the ministry; it extended as well to the definition of the very doctrines of that Church and to every phase of its constitution and policy. This reformation, he maintained, has been necessary in order to establish an undisputed sovereignty in England, in order to endow the nation with strength and elasticity wherewith to meet those conditions which a new age has imposed upon men and upon states. Above all else this sovereignty is dedicated to the extermination of every remnant of clerical zeal, to the harnessing of the destructive and anarchistic forces released by the struggle of the sects for dominance. Parker almost said

¹ [Parker], *True grounds of ecclesiasticall regiment*, 60-61.

² *Ibid.*, 61. Parker makes an amazing observation in this connection. "It may be conceived," he wrote, "that had the Caesars joyned in the propagation of Christ's doctrine, more might have been effected for the advantage of religion by their co-operation, than all Christ's Apostles, Bishops, Prophets . . . and others were able to effect with their supernatural endowment."

that religion had of necessity to be devitalized in order to save society and to protect the credit and the inventories of the mercantile warehouses that spread their sprawling shapes along the Thames.

The Erastian solution of the religious dilemma will actually invigorate religion, Parker contended, in addition to its beneficent political and social consequences. For the churches have worshipped false gods, have sought dominion in the world rather than the conversion of men. In an atmosphere of freedom they will be able fully and tolerantly to return to their spiritual mission. They will discover that the human spirit cannot be compelled, that when religion is reduced to a clash of wills the authority of one man enjoys no superiority over that of another.¹ There is no virtue and, we may suspect, no salvation in a church founded upon compulsion. Hence the toleration which the churches oppose so strenuously will actually redound to their infinite benefit. The churches will confine themselves exclusively to matters of the spirit, emulating Jesus and the apostles, who carefully avoided the weapons of sovereign authority to employ the spiritual weapons of reasonable persuasion.

Finally, Parker argued, and here we discover the root of his Erastianism, the toleration which the civil magistrate will establish will vastly enhance the prosperity and trade of England. Religious liberty has ever been the necessary condition of trade. In defending the monopolistic privileges of the merchant companies in 1648, Parker emphasized the fact that the trading societies, having no vested connection with any church, had been able to win fruitful privileges of liberty of conscience for English merchants in many countries of Europe.² Furthermore, the Merchant Adventurers have set a standard for the entire world in religious tolerance. The Erastian prince will, by his tolerance and aloofness from the religious brawls that have torn the world, gain for England as a whole the benefits which the merchants have partially attained in consequence of their sobriety and moderation. When this

¹ Parker, *True grounds of ecclesiasticall regiment*, 26.

² Parker, Henry, *Of a free trade. A discourse seriously recommending to our nation the wonderfull benefits of trade* (L., 1648), 8.

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has been accomplished a new and fairer day will have dawned for mankind. Trade and peaceful intercourse will gradually heal the wounds which war and religious violence have wrought upon the body of society. The merchant, who "beautifies, enriches, impowers little states, and so alters their naturall dominions, that they seem to swell, as it were, into spacious empires," will be enthroned. Heroes have written their record in battles and conquests, but, Parker lyrically concluded, it is the merchant—"that gentle unbloody prince which by his severall dispersed carricks visits each climate of the world onely to plunder the earths caverns of her metall, or the rocks of their diamonds, or the deepe it selfe of its pearles"—who will write the history of a fairer, more peaceful, and more tolerant world.¹

Henry Parker was a harbinger of a new age, still struggling restlessly in the throes of birth. With a kind of prescience he delineated the thought of a new civilization, a harsher and more realistic civilization that was casting off without nostalgia those guiding strings of history, the traditions of the past. His thought was amazing in its vigour, ruthless in its logic, and startling in its conclusions. It is evident that he so feared and distrusted the disruptive powers of religious institutions that he would surrender them to the completely secular sovereignty of the civil state. If this were done, he predicted with shrewd insight into the workings of the political mind, religious toleration would almost inevitably follow as a necessary condition of modern life. Henry Parker sought political stability and social order above all else. In part he demanded a return to the Erastian stability of the late sixteenth century; in part he brilliantly diagnosed the content of modern politics. Parker sketched in clear and precise outlines the frame of political theory which Hobbes was to rivet firm with his prodigious (and frightened) intellect.

3. WILLIAM PRYNNE, 1600-1669

These Erastian tendencies which Parker's ordered mind so clearly formulated are likewise to be discovered in somewhat

¹ Parker, Henry, *Of a free trade*, 34-35.

confused and almost intuitive form in the innumerable pamphlets of the irascible and volatile William Prynne. Prynne, who was one of the "Puritan martyrs" in 1640, progressed rapidly, through successive stages of violent attack upon Independency and sectarianism, to a bitter assault upon Presbyterianism when he sensed its theocratic disposition, to a narrow kind of Erastianism which required the beating down by the state of every aspect of enthusiasm in the interests of order. Prynne, in other words, embraced Erastianism because he feared the anarchy of sectarianism, though he never extricated himself sufficiently from the fury of conflict to see that the state could regain security only by taking its position upon the firm foundations of religious toleration. Prynne, fundamentally conservative in politics and in religion, was throughout the revolutionary era obsessed with an hysterical fear of the changes which were rending English society. And fear led Prynne to intolerance.

Like so many extremely violent men, Prynne was shy and retiring. A professional writer and a man of great, if undigested, learning, Prynne, according to Aubrey's brilliant sketch, was almost a monkish recluse. "His manner of studie was thus: he wore a long quilt cap, which came, 2 or 3 at least, inches, over his eies, which served him as an umbrella to defend his eies from the light. About every 3 houres his man was to bring him a roll and a pott of ale to refocillate his wasted spirits. So he studied and dranke, and munched some bread; and this maintained him till night."¹

In literally scores of pamphlets Prynne warned England that sectarian anarchy was crumbling not only the structure of religion but the foundations of the state as well.² Individualism has run rampant and the very cement of ordered society is being dissolved. The danger lies not so much in the eccentricity and variety of the monstrous creeds that have been spawned as in the fact that every sect seeks with a fanatical zeal to enthrone its opinions. The discipline which alone holds

¹ Aubrey, John, *Brief lives, chiefly of contemporaries, etc.* (ed. by Andrew Clark) (Oxford, 1898), II, 174.

² As an example *vide* Prynne, William, *A fresh discovery of some prodigious new wand-ring-blasing-stars, & firebrands, stiling themselves new-lights, firing our church and state into new combustions, etc.* (L., 1645), Dedic.

institutions intact, which is the condition of civilized life, is threatened with destruction from a new and dangerous anarchy.¹ The world will be mad indeed, Prynne warned, "when every private minister and Christian may follow their owne opinions, fancies, crochets, waies, every sectary set up his owne congregation, sect, and vent his erroneous . . . opinions without control."² Prynne pleaded not for the advancement of any particular form of truth but for the enforcement by the state of some salutary discipline which would permit England to recover from the insanity of sectarianism run riot.

Prynne proposed to check the spreading cancer of institutional decay by surrendering religion to the complete control of the state. Even in the period when he wrote as a Presbyterian sympathizer, Prynne's views were decidedly Erastian and his conception of the Church violently unorthodox. He maintained that the Bible had ordained no particular ecclesiastical government and that Parliament was accordingly free to erect any Establishment which it chose and rigorously to enforce it upon the nation. Prynne was deeply suspicious of the clerical mentality and shrank in horror from every species of religious fanaticism. He repeatedly warned England that a secular settlement and administration of the Church would alone ensure the nation against the stupid intolerance from which it suffered under Laud and which would again afflict it if the Assembly had its way. The state, in fine, should interpose its overwhelming authority in order to check the ravages of sectarianism and the excesses of clerical zeal. It should define the Church with reasonable liberality and crush by an act of sovereignty all dissent as dangerous and seditious. But its control must be carefully tempered and it must hold itself aloof from clerical influences. Hence it should deny to the clergy even the right of excommunication and the power to suspend from the sacraments, save under very carefully defined and imposed limitations.³

¹ Prynne, William, *Independency examined, unmasked, refuted, by twelve new particular interrogatories, etc.* (L., 1644), 5; Prynne, William, *The Quakers unmasked, etc.* (L. 1655), 8.

² Prynne, William, *Truth triumphing over falshood, antiquity over novelty, etc.* (L., 1644, 1645), 152.

³ Prynne, William, *Four serious questions of grand importance, etc.* (L., 1645); Prynne, William, *Suspention suspended, or, the divines of Syon-Colledge late*

This Erastian solution for the spiritual problems which harassed England was supported, Prynne maintained, by every sound reason in divinity and politics. The state has no control over and should not deplete its energy by interest in the consciences and opinions of its subjects. These matters lie outside the scope of its sovereignty. But it is vitally interested in the actions of its subjects and hence may through the Church compel erratic and dangerous men to conform to a reasonable and legal pattern of religious behaviour.¹ In all ages the state has preserved itself and has protected religion, so necessary to its own stability, by the exercise of this firm discipline. It is nonsense, Prynne bluntly wrote, to hold that "the contemptible sword of excommunication or non-communion, and the bare preaching of Gods Word" can possibly secure the stability which the safety of society demands.² Prynne viewed human nature darkly and evidently would have reposed the ultimate decisions concerning religious worship in the safe and tried hands of Parliament.³ The assembled wisdom of a "court of justice" is far less liable to error than the untutored and giddy emotions which govern individual conduct.⁴ Since religion influences conduct very directly, it is quite as dangerous to invite spiritual anarchy by loosing the political controls on the erratic conscience and the religious emotion.

Prynne regarded all sectarianism as a kind of disorder which, while expressing itself in religious terms, had as its ultimate effect the disintegration of society. He concentrated his attack upon the Independents, not because they were the most incendiary of the many sects, but because they were the most powerful and articulate. Their emphasis upon local autonomy in spiritual affairs would, he maintained, inevitably be followed by independence and disorder in political matters.⁵ Prynne was alarmed, we may believe, by the secondary and not by the primary consequences of spiritual individualism. In particular, he viewed with horror the denial of authority which,

claim of power of suspending scandalous persons, from the Lords Supper, etc. (L., 1648), 2-6, *et passim*.

¹ Prynne, *Truth triumphing over falshood*, 122-123.

² Prynne, *Independency examined*, 12.

³ Prynne, *Truth triumphing over falshood*, 123-125.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁵ Kirby, E. W., *William Prynne, etc.* (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), 81.

so lightly and piously concealed under the claim of mystical revelation, animated the pretensions of almost every sect in England.¹ Independency, he alleged, has by its claim to private authority and its prating of conscience opened the flood-gates of heresy, schism, and rebellion. It has introduced into religious thinking an individualistic philosophy which inevitably must have explosive consequences in social and political organization. The sects plead for themselves in the name of liberty and tolerance, but, Prynne gloomily predicted, their very zeal and their very certainty of truth ensures that once they have gained the mastery a desperate intolerance will flow from their dominance in England.² Prynne proposed, in essence, that a cold, calculating, and reasonable lay intolerance should be employed to destroy zeal and eccentricity while society yet possessed the means for its self-protection.

Prynne's almost hysterical fear of disorder led him to a savage and unrelenting intolerance. It should be observed that he counselled the state to act in the interests of order, not of truth; that he required the state to defend with the sword a reasonable and rather comprehensive definition of the Church, not a rigidly held system of truth. He was, at least in his own view, waging war on intolerance with intolerance. But his hysteria led him to conclusions that could not possibly be applied in the England of his day, persuaded him to embrace judgments that show an amazing want of knowledge of historical development. Prynne makes it plain that serious aberrations from the doctrinal norm imposed by the state should be severely punished, in extreme cases even by death.³ Yet he never clarified his own thinking sufficiently to define even

¹ Prynne, William, *Twelve considerable serious questions touching church government, etc.* (L., 1644), 7; Prynne, William, *A full reply to certaine briefe observations and anti-queries on Master Prynnes twelve questions about church-government, etc.* (L., 1644), 18-19.

² Prynne, *A fresh discovery*, Dedic.; Prynne, William, *The sword of Christian magistracy supported: or a full vindication of Christian kings and magistrates authority under the Gospell, to punish idolatry, apostacy, heresie, blasphemy, and obstinate schism, etc.* (L., 1647), Dedic.

³ [Prynne, William], *Diotrephes catechised: or sixteen important questions touching the ecclesiastical jurisdiction and censures . . . now eagerly pretended to and challenged by a divine right, by some over-rigid Presbyterians, and Independents, etc.* (L., 1646 (2nd ed.)), 4-10; Prynne, *The sword of Christian magistracy*, Dedic., 8, 11, 16, 21, 32-35, 107-112, 168-170.

vaguely what doctrinal and disciplinary system he would support when and if Parliament should establish the Church. Not Episcopacy, he made abundantly plain in some of the most vitriolic pamphlets ever written in the English language; not Presbyterianism as envisaged by the Assembly, he made evident with a gouty rage; not Independency or any other sectarian conception, he spent his mature life demonstrating. It is possible that this remarkable and somewhat unbalanced man, who denounced dissent and eccentricity with such savage and lusty hatred, was himself the most powerful and uncontrollable dissenter and eccentric in all England.

4. JAMES HARRINGTON, 1611-1677

Far more constructive and thoughtful was the Erastianism of James Harrington, one of the most original and stimulating of the many creative thinkers of the seventeenth century. Descended from a noble family,¹ Harrington studied at Oxford, where for a time he was a student of Chillingworth's. Upon leaving the university, Harrington travelled extensively on the Continent, where he showed himself to be a keen observer of institutions. He was particularly impressed by the remarkable stability of the Venetian political and social organization, and in the pursuit of his interest learned the Italian language and purchased many books dealing with Italian politics. Harrington appears to have taken no part in the Civil War until 1647 when, as a moderate acceptable to both extremes, he entered the king's service as a groom of the bedchamber. He soon lost the confidence of the parliamentary leaders because of his independence of judgment, however, and was for a short time subjected to imprisonment. The execution of the king, for whom he entertained a warm personal regard, shocked Harrington deeply and he again withdrew from public life to devote himself to study and writing. Harrington followed closely the trend of political events and political discussion, and his greatest work, *The Oceana*, first published in 1656, sought to lay down a frame of government in which political and religious

¹ Wright, James, *The History of the Antiquities of the County of Rutland* (L., 1684), 49-52.

stability could be gained again in England. His subsequent works were written in defence of the principles which he there outlined, and even governmental pressure following the Restoration was unable to shake him from devotion to the political theory which he had delineated with such clarity and precision.

The *Oceana* was written in the conventional form of a Utopia but it is evident that Harrington was endeavouring to apply to English institutions the test of reason and utility. The social and political organism was cracking before new and disruptive forces which the shell of traditional institutions could no longer control or contain. It was therefore necessary to examine these institutions carefully, dispassionately, and critically in order to frame a new architecture that would accommodate the stresses and thrusts of historical change. In this search for first principles Harrington demonstrated himself to be a pure rationalist, a scholar of distinction, and a completely secular thinker.

Harrington formed his own constitution only after a careful examination of all the institutions of antiquity. In this search he displayed towards the Bible a secular attitude almost unique in his century. It is an historical document, just as is a Roman law or a speech in the Venetian Senate, which reveals something of the technique and philosophy of government. "Ancient prudence" he defined as the art and system of government which had distinguished the ancient world. The political learning and craft of the ancients in government suffered grave injury from the barbarian invasions save in Venice, where the stream of pure and reasonable politics survived, in some degree at least, the savagery that engulfed Western Europe. Harrington lent complete devotion to the "ancient prudence" in his discussions of politics and religion. Even his examples for the ordering of religion are drawn from classical antiquity rather than from the Bible, and when he does examine biblical constitutions he discusses them as profane evidence. Harrington's point of view was completely lay, though he lived in an age that still employed ecclesiastical terminology even for the prosecution of baldly secular objectives.

Harrington's secular spirit may in part be explained by the

intense anti-clericalism which saturates all of his thought. He establishes as a law of politics the position that the control of religion must be vested in the civil state.¹ This Erastian regimen provides the sole guaranty of social order and upon it alone can liberty of conscience be founded. The clergy have ever been troublers of the state and enemies of toleration. When they have enjoyed jurisdiction in religion they have invariably sought to extend their power to its detriment by corruption and persecution.² In his reply to Ferne's objections to the *Oceana*, Harrington reminded his critic that when "the clergy have gained this point, namely, that they are the Catholick Church, or that it is unlawful for gentlemen, either in their private capacity to discourse, or in their publick to propose, as well in the matter of church as state government, neither government nor religion have failed to degenerate into mere priest-craft."³ The clergy must be strictly handled and rigorously excluded from any participation in government. "If you know not how to rule your clergy," Harrington warned, "you will most certainly, like a man that cannot rule his wife, have neither quiet at home, nor honor abroad."⁴

The ecclesiastical constitution which Harrington proposed for his ideal commonwealth was dedicated to the attainment of a larger and purer truth under the strict Erastian control of the state. The Church must be based upon the principle of a religious liberty guaranteed and enforced by the state. Harrington submitted that it was the universal testimony of "ancient prudence" that religion must lie under the undisputed mastery of the civil authority. Above all, there must be no confusion about the meaning of liberty of belief and worship. Any government which professes to afford liberty but which permits the repression of liberty of conscience violates its own nature.⁵ The safety of the state and the inviolability of conscience are most endangered by those religious zealots who

¹ Harrington, James, *The commonwealth of Oceana, etc.* (L., 1656), in *The Oceana and other works of James Harrington, etc.* (ed. by John Toland) (L., 1747), 180-181.

² Harrington, James, *The art of law-giving, etc.* (L., 1659), in *Works*, 448-449.

³ Harrington, James, *Pian Piano, or intercourse between H. Ferne, D.D. and J. Harrington, Esq., etc.* (L., 1656), in *Works*, 551.

⁴ Harrington, *Oceana, Works*, 182.

⁵ *Ibid.*, *Works*, 58.

pretend to have received a revelation of truth that compels them to reduce other men to the particular pattern of belief which they profess.¹ Such pretences to divine guidance in mundane affairs may safely be ignored. For we may be sure that when God desires to enlarge our knowledge of truth to this degree He will do so by a miracle which will make that truth apparent to all men. The state must construct its religious constitution rationally and prudently, and its first action in the interests of reason and tolerance will be the repudiation of all mystical and zealous guidance.

The structure of liberty can be secured and maintained only by the most careful and minute supervision of the institutional aspects of religious life. The state must not content itself with a vague definition of the Church which it leaves to clergymen to administer. Rather it must extend its paternal supervision to the parish—the lowest unit of institutional organization. The crucial test of its control lies in its ordering of the appointment of the parish priest. When a vacancy occurs, the congregation should elect one or two elders who should repair to one of the universities to make known their need and to indicate the value of the living.² The convocation of the university should then designate a probationer to serve the parish during a period of one year. If at the end of his trial period two-thirds of the congregation vote to retain him,³ the minister becomes the permanent priest of the parish.

Harrington held that the state should define precisely the duties of the minister and should set very explicitly the confines of his function. The pastor has no other responsibility than to "pray with the congregation, preach the Word, and administer the sacraments" as defined in articles of faith to be appointed by Parliament.⁴ The constitution of the National Church should be broadly and tolerantly determined, but those who cannot in conscience conform to its doctrines and practices must be permitted full liberty to set up their own churches, select their own pastors, and worship as they see

¹ Harrington, *Oceana*, Works, 75.

² *Ibid.*, Works, 87–88.

³ In the *Art of law-giving* (Works, 450) Harrington suggested that the approval of three-fourths of the parish would be desirable; *et cf.* Works, 127, 629–630.

⁴ Harrington, *Oceana*, Works, 88; *et cf.* Works, 629–630.

fit. All aberrations from the norm established by law will be extended complete toleration save for the faith of the Jews, the papists, and idolaters, for whom special provision will have to be made in the interest of civil order.¹ The government should ensure the toleration upon which it is founded by appointing magistrates empowered to adjudicate religious disputes with final capacity for decision lodged in the Council for Religion. The National Church, thus constituted, will endeavour to enlarge our knowledge of religion and will assiduously study scriptures.² But it should make no arrogant claim to infallibility, since this temper of mind poisons the very well-springs of religion. The greater part of the citizenry will from habits of obedience follow the tuition of a National Establishment which, Harrington shrewdly observed, offers the most certain protection to conscience. But its spirit will not be coercive; it will endeavour to lead the people rather than to drive them.³

The ultimate authority in religion in Harrington's constitution was vested in a strictly lay Council of Religion.⁴ He charged this body with the determination of all cases of religious

¹ *Vide, The art of law-giving, Works, 451*, where Harrington imposes somewhat less rigorous restrictions upon Judaism and Catholicism. Also of interest in this connection are his observations in *The humble petition of divers well affected persons, etc.* (L., 1659), *Works, 544*. Harrington would deny the Catholics complete religious freedom on the grounds that they owe allegiance to a foreign potentate and hence destroy the essence of sovereignty by political conduct almost inevitably seditious. Furthermore, he alleged, intolerance is inextricably a part of their faith. He would bar the Jews from religious liberty because they are non-Christian and hence constitute an independent community in the body politic. But he by no means neglected the Jewish problem. He proposed that Ireland, which he declared to be useless and even dangerous to England, be opened as a Zion to all European Jews. They would be required to pay a rental of four million pounds *per annum* in return for which they would enjoy full rights and protection in their own laws, customs, and worship. Their industry and thrift would soon make a paradise of the wastes of Ireland, and England would gain the spiritual benefit of having befriended an oppressed and persecuted race. (Harrington, *Oceana, Works, 36*.) From various intimations never fully developed it seems probable that Harrington had in mind the solution of the Catholic problem by something like the same method of colonization. The successful experiment in plantation conducted by Lord Baltimore was apparently very much in his mind.

² Harrington, *Oceana, Works, 88-89*.

³ Harrington, *The art of law-giving, Works, 448*.

⁴ Harrington, *Oceana, Works, 124*.

dispute, with the protection of liberty of conscience, and with the general supervision of worship. It is the duty of the Council to provide every parish with a learned and pious minister who should be ensured an income of at least one hundred pounds *per annum*.¹ In order to advance religion and avoid scandal no minister will be permitted to engage in any other calling, and upon due cause ignorant or scandalous ministers may be removed.² When serious disputes concerning doctrine or other controversial questions arise the Council should convene the convocation of each university for the purpose of securing an opinion from the learned. But the ultimate decision of the issue rests strictly and solely with the lay Council. For the sovereignty of the state, in its religious aspect, is lodged exclusively in the Council of Religion.³

Even in Hobbes we discover no colder or more systematic Erastianism than that which dominates Harrington's thought. Harrington would have stripped the clergy not only of all influence on secular policy but of all capacity in ordering the doctrine, framing the discipline, and settling the administration of the Church. He was deeply persuaded that the religious issue must receive a lay solution before peace and stability could be restored in England. He was likewise convinced of the necessity of complete religious liberty in the ordered and civilized state, and that, he constantly reiterates, can be secured and maintained only by disciplining the too-zealous religious impulses of mankind. It would almost seem as if Harrington regarded the religious instinct as an inconvenient nuisance in civil government, which since it could not be ignored must be controlled and canalized to social ends.

Furthermore, Harrington was fascinated by the great benefits which would accrue to England once clerical zeal was restrained by the firm imposition of religious toleration. He recalled that the great ancient systems had gained strength and vigour by their firm devotion to the principles of religious liberty. Rome and Greece protected all men in their devotions, "every nation being so far left to the liberty of conscience, that no violence

¹ Harrington, *Oceana*, Works, 127; *et cf.* Works, 449, 629.

² Harrington, *The art of law-giving*, Works, 451.

³ Harrington, *Oceana*, Works, 127.

for this cause was offer'd to any man."¹ Even in ancient Judaea liberty of spiritual development was preserved by the right of prophecy which enabled John the Baptist and Christ to raise up a new religion within the constitution of Jewish law. The modern world should stand in shame because of its intolerance and impious persecution. "For to make a man in matter of religion, which admits not of sensible demonstration engage to believe no otherwise than is believ'd by my Lord Bishop, or Goodman Presbyter, is a pedantism, that has made the sword to be a rod in the hands of schoolmasters; by which means, whereas the Christian religion is the farthest of any from countenancing war, there never was a war of religion but since Christianity."² England, it is to be hoped, has learned by tragic experience that tyranny either in politics or in religion is insupportable in a modern state.

Harrington summoned England to dedicate itself to the prospects of a larger freedom and the vision of a great and powerful future. England alone stands ready to free her latent energies by a vigorous democracy in politics supported and vitalized by religious liberty and peace.³ The world and the sea, the potentialities which freedom has released, lie open before her.⁴ When these latent resources have been disciplined by a constitution which gives them balance and direction, England will take her rightful place as the most powerful nation in the world. Harrington here argued quite as shrewdly as enthusiastically. A large section of English opinion stood convinced by the experiences of two decades of internal strife that religious extremism and intolerant strife constituted an insuperable barrier to the attainment of national stability and greatness. Such men were approaching the problem of religious toleration pragmatically; their counsel was rather one of necessity than of right or philosophical desirability. The question had now resolved itself into practical problems of administering, accommodating, and preserving ecclesiastical institutions which, it was agreed, must for a variety of reasons

¹ Harrington, James, *The prerogative of popular government . . . in two books, etc.* (L., 1658), in *Works*, 338.

² Harrington, *Oceana*, *Works*, 59.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, 203.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, 36.

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be maintained. The sands of orthodox faith were running out rapidly indeed in Cromwellian England.

Religious toleration enjoyed during the revolutionary period few stouter, more logical, or more systematic defenders than James Harrington.¹ Certainly it is accurate to say that the principles of religious toleration were firmly and inextricably embedded in his system of politics. Harrington carefully defined liberty of conscience as that state of government and social organization in which "a man according to the dictats of his own conscience may have the free exercise of his religion, without impediment to his preferment or imployment in the state."² He added considerable weight to the view engendered by the Civil War that political liberty and liberty of conscience were inseparably linked.³ Therefore the preservation of religious freedom must be viewed as important in shaping the constitution of the state. Men who are endowed with means for the defence of their consciences have in their hands the instruments for the maintenance of their political liberties as well. Hence that frame of government is to be desired which affords to the people the greatest security, the greatest dominance of economic interest, and the most effective institutions for the preservation of liberty, whether civil or religious.

Monarchy, Harrington concluded, is not conducive to religious freedom since the guarantee of liberty in the sphere of conscience would involve the extension of liberties which would endanger monarchy itself. Furthermore, in this form of government the state religion reflects only the private views of one man or, at best, of a small group, and consequently does not provide for religion a stable basis in popular support.⁴ Hence such a government will be driven to the forcible support of the state religion and will inevitably endeavour to

¹ For other estimates of his contribution *vide* Lecky, *Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism*, II, 82-83; Gooch, G. P., *English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1898, 1927), 248-249; Ruffini, Francesco, *Religious Liberty* (L. and N.Y., 1912), 175-176.

² Harrington, James, *A system of politics, etc.* (L., 1700), in *Works* (1742 ed.), 505-506.

³ Harrington, James, *Political aphorisms* (L., 1659), in *Works*, 516. *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, vol. III, for a full discussion of this important development.

⁴ Harrington, *System of politics, Works*, 506.

extirpate dissent as a threat to civil stability. In like manner any government founded upon the anarchy of mob rule by "the saints" holds its power unjustly and precariously. For here too a fanatical minority labours to impose its views upon the nation at large.¹ We may conclude that "without liberty of conscience, civil liberty cannot be perfect; and without civil liberty, liberty of conscience cannot be perfect."² Those governments which are best prepared to fulfil the requirements of the modern age, Harrington repeatedly indicated, must rest their constitutions upon a proper distribution of property and an adequate balance of interests to the end that selfish factions can neither invade nor destroy civil and religious freedom.

This broad and secure foundation may best be achieved, Harrington consistently maintained, by an aristocratic democracy.³ Democracy will in its very nature provide adequate safeguards for liberty of conscience, since by these provisions it strengthens itself most impregnably against the extremes of monarchy and anarchy. England, he predicted, had advanced so far along this road that she, of all the nations of Europe, would probably first achieve this most perfect constitution. But she must carefully guard the foundations of the constitution. Thus all vestiges of a House of Peers should be eradicated since this House has by tradition been closely associated with the divines in the defence of faith. And the divines, Harrington again repeated, "are no fair huntsmen, but love dearly to be poaching or clubbing with the secular arm."⁴ England must carefully and thoroughly cleanse her government of every element of clerical control, whether direct or indirect. France, Harrington prophetically suggested, would next after England find that stable basis of constitution upon which the modern state must rest. France has already attained a partial degree of liberty of conscience, though it is evident "that while the hierarchy is standing this liberty is falling, and . . . if ever it comes to pull down the hierarchy it pulls

¹ Harrington, James, *Valerius and Publicola: or, the true form of a popular commonwealth, etc.* (L., 1659), in *Works*, 488.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, 489.

³ This conception is elaborately defined in the *Oceana*.

⁴ Harrington, *The art of law-giving, Works*, 469-470.

down that monarchy also; wherefore the monarchy or hierarchy will be beforehand with it, if they see their true interest."¹

England, Harrington warned at the time of the Restoration, must labour under no delusion about the choices that confront her. Monarchy pretends to support an infallible definition of religious truth which it sustains by coercive means. It so happens that persecution destroys the very essence of religion, but a monarchy, shoring up its weakening foundations, employs religious weapons for essentially political ends. The alliance of priest and king is ancient and it has been consistently the enemy of human freedom. On the other hand, democracy "pretends not to infallibility, but is in matters of religion no more than a seeker, not taking away from its people their liberty of conscience, but educating them, or as many of them as shall like of it, in such a manner or knowledge in divine things as may render them best able to make use of their liberty of conscience, which it performs by the national religion."² This frame of government alone possesses sufficient virtue, resiliency, and detachment to provide to all men who peacefully profess the Christian faith complete liberty and encouragement in their quest for truth.³

Harrington stated in precise and balanced terms positions which England had learned by a bitter experience were necessary for the preservation of national life. It is evident that Harrington in his writings after the publication of *Oceana* was using the wide-spread devotion to the principles of religious liberty in a vain effort to prevent the restoration of monarchy. But he gave voice to principles which were never again absent from the forum of public discussion. Englishmen were now prepared to concede that religious persecution could have no place in the life of a modern state; they had become bitterly suspicious of all claims of an infallibly known and coercively supported system of religious truth; and the conviction had been deeply burned into the public consciousness that, as Harrington so eloquently insisted, religious liberty and political liberalism are inextricably joined. Harrington thought and wrote as a layman who reduced religion and its institu-

¹ Harrington, *System of politics*, Works, 506.

² *Ibid.*, Works, 507.

³ Harrington, *Humble petition*, Works, 544.

tions to a formula of politics. Dominating his thought is a cold and contemptuous anti-clericalism and a subtle and insistent determination to divert the religious emotion into channels serviceable to the state and society. In this incisive and almost brutal Erastianism he was closely linked with his greater contemporary, Thomas Hobbes.

5. THOMAS HOBBS, 1588-1679

The naked Erastianism and the almost frightening conception of sovereignty which undergird Hobbes's political thought reflect the impress of a generation of revolutionary change and disorder upon an essentially shy mind. Dominating every page of his political writings is a restless search for order, the quest for foundations of stability in an age of change. Hobbes could not accept and, we may believe, never clearly understood the profoundly significant currents of thought—religious, social, and political—which were so visibly changing the intellectual topography of the seventeenth century.¹ His solution, which stands in sharp contrast to that proposed by Harrington, was the imposition of a heavy and complete sovereignty upon the restless and divisive fragments of a society caught in the ferment of change. While he stoutly and caustically attacked the intellectual and moral foundations of the medieval ideal of an organic society, he posed in fact the conception of a new organic state by his surrender to sovereignty of every aspect of human life and action. The awful weight and intent of Hobbes's political philosophy was misunderstood by his own and subsequent generations; it may be that our own age stands best prepared by a harsh tuition to grasp its full implications.

We need mention Hobbes's theory of sovereignty but briefly since he lends it full consideration in his discussion of the problems which religion imposes upon the state. His conception of absolute sovereignty is clearly derived from a low

¹ *Vide* the preface to his *Philosophical rudiments concerning government and society* (L., 1651), in *The English works of Thomas Hobbes* (ed. by Sir William Molesworth) (L., 1839-1845), II, xx-xxii. (*The English works* will hereafter be cited as *Works*.)

view of human nature and the materialistic conviction that human conduct, whether individual or social, rests upon no other basis than that of self-preservation. Self-preservation expresses itself in the fear which men exhibit in the face of pain and in the desperate search for security which marks their conduct when they have once attained power. Men in a state of nature are controlled by no restraint save fear, which in advanced societies has been sublimated into dread of punishment. Furthermore, men are by nature completely brutish and anarchistic; society has preserved itself and has disciplined its component parts to an end which transcends the elements of its composition only by the forcible application of reasonable and effective controls upon the naturally anarchistic disposition of men. Thus an absolute sovereignty has been established by men who in the interests of survival have made an irrevocable cession of their liberty. The political form which this sovereignty may assume is insignificant in relation to its content and virtue, but is highly important in relation to its effectiveness. Men insistently seek to dissolve the sovereignty which alone preserves them from barbarism, and it consequently follows that that species of government is best which by its very nature is most easily and effectively rendered absolute.

Throughout his life Hobbes professed that of all political forms absolute monarchy was the vessel best designed to hold intact the precious essence of sovereignty.¹ The absolute character of its dominion, he taught, may be sustained whether we trace its inception from the original power of the father or from the original cession of power by men threatened by anarchistic extinction. The absolute monarch is the best and most effective repository for the complete and indivisible sovereignty which must reside somewhere in any ordered society. In it men "voluntarily replace compulsive mutual fear by the again compulsive fear of a neutral third power . . . and thus they substitute for an immeasurable, endless, and inevitable danger . . . a measurable, limited, and avoidable danger—the danger which threatens only the law-breakers from the courts of law."² But the state must be ever vigilant

¹ It was first stressed in his translation of Thucydides.

² Strauss, Leo, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Oxford, 1936), 67.

against the seditious forces which incessantly threaten to destroy the substance of sovereignty. It surveys every action in terms of its own safety and, since action is spawned in thought, it seeks by every means to mould and influence thought as well. It cannot, manifestly, control thought, but "failing that, the least it can do is to make itself master, and sole master, of all the outward machinery by which the thoughts of men are influenced or directed."¹ Every element of society which threatens sovereignty must be either controlled and canalized to an effective end, or destroyed. For it must be realized that sovereignty is instantly lost when it can no longer impose its authority or maintain order. Society then reverts, Hobbes argued with the Civil War in mind, to a natural state in which the barbarism of aimless and destructive war shatters the fragile structure of government.² Hobbes, it may be suggested, pleaded for an authority so complete and absolute that it could avoid and divert the dissolving shock of revolutionary change. Hence the sovereign must survey his enemies, must analyse the forces of disintegration gnawing constantly at the vitals of his power and reduce them by the heavy force of an authority which is *de jure* because it is *de facto*.

Of all the dangers which threaten the power of the sovereign the most insidious and destructive is religion. The entire corpus of Hobbes's thought is remarkably consistent, but on no other question was he as completely and almost violently consistent as in his Erastianism. When he moves to the discussion of religion or to a consideration of the clergy his style instinctively tightens into a nervous and penetrating logic while the caustic of his bitter irony bites deeply into pretensions which he considered as absurd as they were dangerous. Hobbes raised English Erastianism into a system of politics and grasped with hands that were both tough and dextrous those thorny questions which earlier thinkers had felt constrained either to ignore or to treat with an evasive indirection. Hobbes bitterly attacked as monstrous and seditious the claims

¹ Vaughan, C. E., *Studies in the History of Political Philosophy Before and After Rousseau* (Manchester, 1925), I, 25.

² Lechler, G. V., *Geschichte des englischen Deismus* (Stuttgart und Tübingen, 1841), 103-104.

of all churches to an authority and jurisdiction over the human spirit. With some measure of circumspection he trained his most devastating blasts upon the Church of Rome, but it is patent that his strictures have and are meant to have general validity. His reply to the age-old pretensions of the Church was to swallow whole the Church into the limitless maw of the civil state.¹ For Hobbes was more than an Erastian; the persuasive sweep of his logic half-concealed one of the most sceptical minds that the modern world has known. And it was a scepticism grievously dangerous to institutional religion, since with ordered care he left exposed no corners of outright heresy and unbelief against which the orthodox could effectively apply their still powerful levers.

Hobbes's devastating criticism of religion and the institutions which sustain it was developed gradually during his earlier writings to reach overwhelming proportions in the *Leviathan*. He proceeded by careful stages to the position that the authority by which we believe the Bible to be the Word of God is vested solidly and inextricably in the state.² He cedes to the state, as we shall see, absolute power in determining not only the formal worship of the Church but the doctrines which it professes; while in the *Elements* he concedes to dissidents nothing save the possibility of martyrdom. And even this desperate liberty he withdraws in the *Leviathan*. Religion is a necessary attribute of human nature which the state must recognize as inevitable and dangerous, but controllable. It must be carefully and rigorously disciplined to the interests of the state, and, he very nearly says, the sole measure of its virtue is to be found in the services which it may render to sovereignty. He favours no particular form of church government, simply holding that some are less dangerous than others and hence that the state must be duly prudent in the ordering of the institutions within which religion is to be canalized to

¹ Seth, James, *English Philosophers and Schools of Philosophy* (L., 1912, 1925), 73-74.

² Hobbes, Thomas, *De cive*, in *Thomae Hobbes Malmesburiensis opera philosophica quae latine scripsit omnia, etc.* (L., 1839-1845), II, 425-426. (The *Opera philosophica* will hereafter be cited as *Opera*.) Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*; or, the matter form, and power of a commonwealth, ecclesiastical and civil (L., 1651), in *Works*, III, 366 ff.

social ends. In this strong and daring thought Erastianism was brought to the logical, if distasteful, conclusions of which it was inherently compounded. Hobbes differed from the earlier English Erastians only in an un-English cruelty of precise definition.

The scarcely concealed scepticism which dominated Hobbes's earlier works ripened in the *Leviathan* into one of the most damaging and systematic attacks ever made upon revealed religion. In 1636 he had expressed his respect for Lord Herbert's *De Veritate* as a "high point,"¹ but in his earlier writings he concealed his vigorous scepticism by savage attacks upon the relatively safe targets of scholasticism and Roman Catholicism. His fear and hatred of Rome were real, but it seems evident that when he assailed the pretensions of a particular clergy he had all clergymen in mind. The attack was as subtle as it was vicious. Hobbes, like Selden, was a master of biblical learning. He massed his texts in the orthodox style of his generation, but he employed the scriptures as no other man had ever used them. For he undertook by the Bible to destroy the credibility of revealed religion and to sap the very foundations of its authority. He cast grave doubt upon the credibility of the Old Testament, while he submitted that, revelation aside, we accept the gospel upon no other authority than the pronouncement of the state.² We have, indeed, no positive knowledge of God. We search blindly for a final cause to arrive at no stronger conclusion than to "conceive there is a cause . . . which men call God; and yet not have an idea, or image of him in . . . mind."³ Hobbes suggests in the *De cive* that atheism is almost inevitable unless we are blessed with revelation, and then in subsequent works subjects the probability of revelation to a withering criticism.⁴ We discover in Hobbes, in heightened and crystallized form, the intense

¹ *Hobbes to the Earl of Newcastle*, June 12, 1636, *Historical Manuscripts Commission Reports, The Manuscripts of . . . the Duke of Portland, etc.* (L., 1891-1931), II, 128; *et cf.* his letter to the Earl of Devonshire, May 12, 1648, *H.M.C. Reports, ninth report, Appendix*, IX, 439.

² Leland, John, *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers that have appeared in England in the Last and Present Century, etc.* (L., 1798), I, 36.

³ Hobbes, *Leviathan, Works*, III, 93.

⁴ Hobbes, *De cive, Opera*, II, 351-352; Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments, Works*, II, 156-157; Hobbes, *Leviathan, Works*, III, 273, 274-275, 432-437.

secularism, the religious indifference, and the complete repudiation of the medieval ideal which we have concluded were typical of the lay mind in England on the eve of the Restoration. The progeny of the acrimonious ecclesiastical disputes and the wasting sectarian conflicts of the seventeenth century was a frigid and deep-rooted religious indifference, and indifference is the sire of religious toleration.

Hobbes discovered the natural origins of religion in the fear and credulity of mankind. He suggested that just as sovereignty orders and controls the lust and anarchy born of fear, so religious institutions blend the abject fear of the individual into a larger whole and thereby diminish the social danger of superstitious frenzy. We fear that which we cannot understand; fear is the derivative of our ignorance. Thus men create and invest invisible powers with the capacity for working good and evil, "by which means it hath come to pass, that from the innumerable variety of fancy, men have created in the world innumerable sorts of gods. And this fear of things invisible, is the natural seed of that, which every one in himself calleth religion; and in them that worship, or fear that power otherwise than they do, superstition."¹ The scope of our religion, therefore, is diminished precisely as the circle of our knowledge and understanding broadens. Men who do not possess knowledge of natural causes are haunted by fears which they resolve by religious incantation. They seek to determine their fortune by the propitiation of invisible controlling agencies, thereby giving rise to worship. They give to their imagined gods such expressions of reverence as they would lend to powerful men whose anger they would mollify or whose favour they would purchase. Religion, then, is born out of "opinion of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion towards what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics."²

The scathing logic of Hobbes's analysis of natural religion proceeded with a surgical exactness to the consideration of the institutions which men create as instrumentalities of worship. It is evident that the impulse of worship, born of ignorance and nourished in fear, must be controlled lest it destroy society.

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 93.

² *Ibid.*, Works, III, 98.

The anarchy of natural worship created problems quite as dangerous to primitive society as did the anarchy of political liberty. Hence the sovereign intervened to discipline and direct worship by institutionalizing it, only to discover that a potential danger could be exploited as an asset of sovereignty. The sovereign was able in fact to implement the sanctions of his power by clothing its origin in a supernatural myth. He shrewdly took care "to make it believed, that the same things were displeasing to the gods, which were forbidden by the laws."¹

In this remarkable discussion we discover the basis for Hobbes's complete Erastianism. He regarded religion as a derivative of superstition, founded upon the lowest instincts of mankind, which, unless it were sternly controlled, might destroy society. For it rests upon an irrational and blinding fear which drives men to dangerous courses and desperate treasons. It is a violently explosive force which the state must exploit to its own advantage lest it be imperilled. Hence he would say—and the observation is basic to his thought—that religion is not a matter of philosophy, but of law.² The state must warp the powerful emotions of religion to the strengthening of the fabric of its own sovereignty; the virtue of religion, in other words, consists solely in its contribution to the power of the state. Whether the religion ordained by the sovereign is fabricated of truth or of fantasy is quite inconsequential; the social end achieved is the same and the due obedience of the subject is comprehended in either case. The ruler will ever be sensible to the grave danger which confronts him if the completeness of his control over the Church is for an instant relaxed. For the Church possesses great advantage in its claim to supernatural knowledge and in its ability to enthrall the ignorant and the superstitious in the nets of its subtleties. That sovereign is in mortal danger who fails to comprehend the intimate connection between religion and the sources of power. The prince must seek to master it and to understand the morphology of its natural history. He will observe that

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 103.

² Hobbes, Thomas, *Seven philosophical problems and two propositions of geometry* (L., 1682), in Works, VII, 5.

new religions rise from time to time and that old ones decay as the priesthood strain natural credulity too far or order the institutions of worship too flagrantly to their own advantage.¹

Hobbes found in the history of the revolutionary era abundant proof that religion and the clerical pretensions which flow from it were still infinitely dangerous to the state and the ordered life which he declared 'constitute civilization. The frenzy of natural religion must be strictly and carefully controlled by an ever-vigilant sovereign. Yet, since religion is born of ignorance, some few men may emancipate themselves from superstition and at the same time escape the rigidity of the state's control by the use of the reason with which man is endowed. That is to say, such a man will continue to lend obedience to the forms of worship which the state prescribes precisely as he obeys all civil laws, but the sword of the state will not in this particular touch his intellect. We may be sure that in the absence of a clear and universal revelation we may proceed in religion according to the guidance of our own reason. This supreme talent must not "be folded up in the napkin of an implicit faith, but employed in the purchase of justice, peace, and true religion."² The man who carves out for himself a reasonable faith and a reasonable pattern of life succeeds in emancipating himself from the toils of the supernatural.³ Above all else the man who seeks to guide his life by the light of reason must be sceptical of the claims of all those who confuse truth with the vapoury vision of revelation.⁴ Those who say that God spoke to them in a dream or vision say nothing more than that they dreamed God spoke to them. The core of our rationalism must be kept hard and tight as the guarantee of our integrity. We must decline to lend greater obedience to the claims of religious belief than our reason or, as we are Christian, the Bible requires of us.

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, *Works*, III, 109.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, III, 359-360.

³ Hobbes, Thomas, *De corpore politico: or the elements of law, moral and politic*, etc. (L., 1650), in *Works*, IV, 116; Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, *Works*, II, 51.

⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, *Works*, III, 361. *Vide post*, 315-317, for a fuller discussion of his views on revelation.

Following this important abstract discussion of the place of natural religion in society, Hobbes turned to a very precise, though deliberately repetitious, consideration of the special claims of Christianity and its institutional manifestation, the Church. It is evident that he sought by a masterly interpretation of the Bible to divest the Church of all pretensions to independent power and to deny to it any binding claims upon the conscience and reason of mankind. He declares that the most vicious of the errors which have deluded the Church is the belief that there must be upon the earth some infallible agency for the interpretation of divine truth. This power, which enjoys no support in reason or scripture, is quite as dangerous whether it is vested in a pope or in an assembly of pastors.¹ Upon this falsehood the Church has sought to build an arrogated power; from it have been forged weapons with which the civil magistracy has been assailed; and in its name the peace and security which the civil law affords have been undermined.

It must be admitted, Hobbes continued, that the claims of Christianity, linked as they are with the supernatural, raise very grave questions both in political theory and in private conduct. The problem really pivots on what we are required to believe in Christianity as the undisputed essential of faith. Herein we have an irreducible core of belief which sovereignty must treat tenderly and which in a philosophical sense it does not master. "For if the command of the civil sovereign be such, as that it may be obeyed without the forfeiture of life eternal; not to obey is unjust."² But, conversely, if the ruler commands us to violate the essential faith upon which we believe our salvation to depend, we dare not risk eternal damnation as the price of obedience. Since salvation depends upon obedience both to the laws of the sovereign and to the requirements of our own faith, it follows that no question in political thought has greater importance than the definition of necessary faith. The question of whether the essence of belief which Christianity imposes is true or not is not relevant,

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, *Works*, III, 606-607.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, III, 585.

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since the state and common consent have declared it to be true.¹

The fanaticism and the divisions that have so grievously weakened the state have invariably proceeded from a warring confusion concerning what is and what is not essential to salvation. We must bear strictly in mind the undisputed fact that the prince may command us in all matters not required for salvation.² So far as Christianity is concerned, Hobbes repeatedly and almost pleadingly maintained, the necessary core of faith (the *unum necessarium*) is encompassed in belief that Jesus is the Christ.³ This is the clear testimony of the scriptures and it is evident because we are taught that the essentials of faith are simple. All the subtleties and complexities which ambitious clerics have added to the *Grundlage* of belief are nothing else than artifices calculated to entrap the minds of the ignorant.⁴ Many other matters are true in divinity but this does not make them necessary. There has been a deliberate and destructive conspiracy to enslave the world by binding men to a complex and ridiculous system of required dogma. Indeed, "if a man could not be saved without assent of the heart to the truth of all controversies, which are now in agitation concerning religion, I cannot see, how any man living can be saved; so full of subtilty, and curious knowledge it is to be so great a divine."⁵ All the warring sects, all the proud churches of the world, Hobbes submitted, are united in the essentials of faith and in nothing else. All other questions, and amongst these the philosopher would include the trinity, the eucharist, and predestination, are not connected with faith at all, but with philosophy and wit.

Faith, as Hobbes was to stress later, is by its very nature invisible and hence lies outside the area of human jurisdiction.

¹ Hobbes suggests that social organisms derive their faith not from reason but from the powerful forces of environment. Our teachers, our parents, and the compelling force of tradition commonly determine our religion. (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 589.)

² Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, Works, II, 299.

³ Hobbes, *De corpore politico*, Works, IV, 174-176, 179; Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, Works, II, 306-307; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 590.

⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 597, *et passim*.

⁵ Hobbes, *De corpore politico*, Works, IV, 180, *et cf.* *Philosophical rudiments*, Works, II, 309-310.

Certain actions may flow from it which render a man disobedient to the civil law and hence punishable, but it is the action and not the faith that is punished.¹ Consequently the weight of sovereignty destroys the belief of no man, but it should be clearly understood that virtues other than simple faith are required for the attainment of salvation. We are likewise commanded to render due obedience to the civil law which includes the religious ordinances erected by the sovereign. Hobbes would argue that since all churches profess the essential doctrines of Christianity we cannot in conscience or law deny our obedience to that one which the ruler, whether from the persuasion of policy or conscience, happens to ordain for his realm. In any event obedience can be withheld only by embracing a dubious martyrdom.² For the requirement of civil obedience is fully as binding as the obligation of faith, is, indeed, the tangible evidence of our faith. Hobbes traps dissent in almost inescapable toils of superb logic. Evidently, he argues, no action or command of the magistrate regarding worship and conduct can possibly invade the marrow of our faith, which is subjective and personal. We must accordingly lend implicit submission, since to resist the command of sovereignty is to set our individual will against the will of a nation and to betray our obedience by sedition. Rarely indeed in history, as Hobbes elsewhere demonstrates, can we escape obedience in martyrdom, and if we do so we gain our reward in heaven without incurring the damnation that follows levying war upon our lawful sovereign.³

Hobbes here knits into tightness strands of thought which, as we have seen, two generations of English history had been slowly weaving out of the stuff of experience. He took a now common Christian assumption that the essentials of faith are few and generally entertained as the fulcrum upon which to apply the leverage of a matchless logic, in order to prove the contention that the ruler may, whether from the persuasion of conscience or convenience, establish any ecclesiastical system that suits the requirements of his policy. This decision is an attribute of sovereignty, wholly beyond the capacity of the

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 518-519.

² *Ibid.*, Works, III, 316.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, III, 601.

subject to question, whether he be Christian or not. We infer indeed that in the very absolutism of the state's sovereignty Hobbes discovered the grounds of an absolute tolerance. This tolerance is gained because the state, having reduced the church to impotency, is interested only in tempering religious enthusiasm and in protecting its sovereign resources against the dangers inherent in fanaticism. The state, he reiterates, really has no concern or interest in what we believe. It is preoccupied only with the maintenance of peace, and will assuredly not arouse the sleeping lions of fanaticism or destroy its subjects for an opinion. Persecution, which the philosopher condemned as a cession of precious power to a faction, always flows from a vested clerical interest which Hobbes was intent upon destroying.¹ From this theory a negative toleration is gained which removes the possibility of persecution by delimiting to the point of extinction the body of essential faith and then declaring that such truth has none but subjective meaning. This position ensures a broad and comprehensive institutional worship by declaring that devotion is a civil function ordered by the primitive state in the interests of propitiation and by the advanced society as a restraint upon credulous and enthusiastic men whose emotions must be controlled in the interests of stability.

Hence, Hobbes continued, the inclusion of religion within the scope of sovereignty cannot be argued to impinge unjustly upon the private and religious conscience. The question did not arise in earlier civilizations, he suggests with a rare nostalgia for antiquity, since the civil and divine laws were indissolubly merged in one authority.² But in the modern world a natural state of anarchy has all but been restored by the preposterous persuasion that every man may draw conclusions and base actions upon a private interpretation of the Bible.³ The public law is in no sense interested in the beliefs or the delusions which its subjects may entertain, but it is most vitally concerned with their actions.³ No wise sovereign will undertake to extend the power of law, which governs actions only, to

¹ Stephen, Leslie, *Hobbes* (L. and N.Y., 1904), 234.

² Hobbes, *De corpore politico*, *Works*, IV, 171-172.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, IV, 172.

an examination of the consciences of men so long as they scrupulously conform in deed. Such a policy not only violates natural law and common prudence but, when persecution is dedicated to a moral end, destroys sovereignty itself. "For who is there, that knowing there is so great danger in an error, whom the natural care of himself, compelleth not to hazard his soul upon his own judgment, rather than that of any other man that is unconcerned in his damnation?"¹ The civil state, once it has mastered the seditious forces of religious fanaticism, will not endanger the very corner-stone of its sovereignty by loosing a rage of persecution which, once released, cannot easily be recalled.

The state insists only upon conformity of action. It has no concern whatsoever with belief, though it will prudently endeavour by the many agencies which it commands gradually to shape conviction to a uniform mean.² But it will deliberately and ruthlessly destroy the thicket of anarchy into which all seditious men flee: the delusion that conscience is the measure of action and the determiner of sin. This is an argument drawn from the brutish state of nature. When man was subject to no law, he submitted only to the rule of conscience. But as fear and destruction caused him to organize political institutions he embraced as his guide the public law which is the public conscience.³ When this principle is not sustained the very foundations of government are overthrown. The plea of conscience is ever the rationalization inspiring impious rebellion.³ Nor can man release himself again into anarchy by the specious claim of revelation or the non-typical requirements of his personal faith. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by those accidents, which guide us into the presence of them that speak to us; which accidents are all contrived by God Almighty; and yet are not supernatural, but only . . . unobservable. Faith and sanctity, are indeed not very frequent; but yet they are not miracles, but brought to pass by education, discipline, correction, and other natural ways."⁴ This is to

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 684.

² *Ibid.*, Works, III, 311; Hobbes, *De corpore politico*, Works, IV, 186-187.

³ Hobbes, *De corpore politico*, Works, IV, 190-191, 204.

⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 312.

suggest that faith itself is an accident more nearly related to time and place than to certain or absolute values. Our faith is actually an amalgam of the religious ideas and traditions of the society in which we live, is in fact a derivative of that social organism in which history has moulded us. The claim of particularism therefore is as invalid when posed in religion as in politics, and is in either case seditious.

Hobbes had at this point completed the structure of his argument which underlies the treatment of the vital problem of the relations of the church and state. His view on this important question cannot properly be understood without steady reference to the remarkable theory which undergirds it. The great Erastian admits at the outset that Christianity has by its historical development raised very serious questions concerning the nature of the Church and its role in the civil commonwealth. He professes as well that he will resolve the question by strict reference to proofs which all Christians must accept and that he will keep steadily in mind the arguments which may be raised against the conception of sovereignty that he has posed.¹ In justice to Hobbes it must be said that he fulfilled his commitment scrupulously, though he put the Bible to use which it has scarcely experienced before or since.

The Bible employs the word *church* in so many senses that no precise definition can be given for its meaning. It may be, and historically has been, regarded as "a company of men professing Christian religion, united in the person of one sovereign, at whose command they ought to assemble, and without whose authority they ought not to assemble."¹ In other words, the Church in the sense of a visible, effective organization must have a structure and an authority which it can derive only from the sovereign. Thus it is co-extensive with the state and is in a true sense identical with it: "that which is called a city, as it is made up of men, the same, as it consists of Christians, is styled a church."² The state is concerned only with the Church of this world and bears in mind that Christians, so long as they are in this world, form

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, *Works*, III, 459.

² Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, *Works*, II, 278.

a Church only *in potentia*. Since there is upon earth no universal Church,¹ every Christian owes due obedience to the church of the nation in which God has seen fit to place him. The concept of *Church* gains reality only in so far as it enjoys a constitution and a valid authority. Hence private conventicles and sects are not churches even if they happen to profess true doctrines; they possess truth but not power.²

In truth, then, the Church enjoys capacity and legitimate authority only as it has been constituted by the sovereign. The Church can be defined as the state in its spiritual aspect. Sovereignty in both church and state resides in the prince, and disobedience to the prince in either of his capacities is sheer rebellion.³ On no other point is the indivisibility of sovereignty as clearly manifested or of such consequence. For throughout Christian history the civil state has been warred on by a presumptuous and impious clergy which has sought to dissolve the very essence of sovereignty. These men have endeavoured to raise up a "ghostly authority against the civil" and thereby to accomplish a veritable revolution clothed in the garb of piety. The clergy have not sought a religious freedom; naked power has been the goal of their rebellion. There can be no confusion in this issue which they have raised: one power or the other is sovereign; "seeing the ghostly power challengeth the right to declare what is sin, it challengeth by consequence to declare what is law, sin being nothing but the transgression of the law."⁴ So long as there is conflict between the spiritual and secular authorities, so long as sovereignty is impaired by the fact of such division, the commonwealth stands exposed to civil war and dissolution. In such a contingency the civil ruler must act with ruthless despatch, for he faces a dangerous and desperate adversary. He will enjoy the support of all reasonable and prudent men, but his enemies, "because the fear of darkness and ghosts, is greater than other fears, cannot want a party sufficient to trouble, and sometimes to destroy a commonwealth."⁵ These men are the

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 576.

² Hobbes, Thomas, *An answer to a book published by Dr. Bramhall . . . called the Catching of the Leviathan*, etc. (L., 1682), in Works, IV, 337.

³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 459-460, 569.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Works, III, 316.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Works, III, 317.

most dangerous of all the enemies of stability and order, as the sad annal of Christian history and the recent tragedy of England have so abundantly demonstrated.

Hobbes strengthened with great care and buttressed with adept scriptural proofs the position that ecclesiastical authority is firmly lodged in the civil magistrate as an essential element of sovereignty. In the Old Testament the civil ruler was clearly vested with supreme ecclesiastical authority and was considered to speak with the voice of God.¹ Following the death of Christ, the ecclesiastical power, which was purely spiritual, remained vested in the apostles and their successors so long as they resided in a non-Christian community.² This period of pure Christianity conclusively proves that the ministry of the Church is strictly limited to persuasion and preaching in the propagation of faith.³ To command men to obedience is an act of sovereignty in no wise related to the proper functions of the pastor. These men seek only to inspire faith which has "no relation to, nor dependance at all upon compulsion or commandment; but only upon certainty or probability of arguments drawn from reason, or from something men believe already."⁴

The substance of faith, therefore, bears no relation whatsoever to the formal worship which the civil magistrate ordained when he became Christian. This distinction is vital and must be kept very clear. "Faith is a gift of God, which men can neither give, nor take away by promise of rewards, or menaces of torture." It is something which in no wise concerns the sovereign because neither he nor any other human being enjoys competency in this matter. But—and this is Hobbes's astounding conclusion—the ruler can require formal worship as an act of obedience, which "is but an external thing, and no more than any other gesture whereby we signify our obedience."⁵ The worship which the state enjoins therefore is rather more a civil function than an act of faith. We fulfil it as an act of obedience which secures our self-preservation

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 461-475. ² *Ibid.*, Works, III, 485-486.

³ Hobbes, *De corpore politico*, Works, IV, 195; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 489.

⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 491.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Works, III, 493.

and which does not vitiate the essence of our faith. Nor, Hobbes carefully repeats, may men escape the obligations of obedience by martyrdom. He who dies for every delusion of private interpretation or to advance the interests of the clergy does not suffer martyrdom but incurs the merited death of a criminal, since by admission the state does not claim and does not enjoy competency to destroy faith.¹

In this remarkable argument Hobbes secured the emancipation of the state from religious control by the simple expedient of making the church completely subject to it. The requirements of sovereignty are made the infallible test of religion; the state in the final analysis has been charged with the determination of what shall be reckoned good and evil.² The sovereign possesses an absolute right to cast the constitution and the worship of the church in any form he pleases, and by a terrible and effective logic Hobbes cut away the possible ground of opposition. When the religious man is denied even the possibility of martyrdom, religion has indeed been bound in the inexorable chains of policy. By granting the full case of the personality and the subjectivity of faith Hobbes had destroyed the possibility both of persecution and of sectarian resistance. An icy toleration, the tolerance of spiritual death, emerges from this masterly and amazing logic. It was a logic that employed none but the materials provided by the Bible to destroy not only the Bible but the integrity of the Church as well. For a century or more the scriptures had been the quarry from which political theorists had mined their arguments, the infallible source of their conclusions. The folds of argument had now been pulled taut and a shocked Europe realized that the divines had been trapped in a web of their own contriving. Following the publication of the *Leviathan* the Bible speedily disappeared as the prime source of political theory.

Having established the absolute capacity of the magistrate in the church on grounds which the seventeenth century found

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, *Works*, III, 495-496. Hobbes would seem to limit the possibility of martyrdom to the ministers of Christ who upon rare occasion may be commanded by an unwise and unchristian sovereign to renounce the fundamental articles of Christian faith.

² Ranke, *History of England*, III, 573.

it difficult to refute, Hobbes turned to a careful and exhaustive analysis of the nature of the ecclesiastical authority and its relation to the art and science of politics. Since the most dangerous of all the enemies of the sovereign is the priesthood, it behooves the ruler to order with precision and care the formal worship of the church which derives its authority exclusively from his power. In the establishment of this constitution a very careful distinction must be drawn between the formal worship which the state enjoins and the private worship which is the reflection of particular faith. The state will punish as a civil offence any heterodoxy in formal worship, while leaving free the private worship of its citizens so long as it is observed secretly and discreetly.¹ The public worship of the state in a true sense transcends the private devotions of the citizen; it is in fact the state's worship in which each man joins as a citizen. It may actually bear no relation whatever to his private worship.² But no contradiction is here involved, since in one capacity the individual acts as a citizen and in the other as a private person.³

Hobbes resolved with trenchant logic certain problems which his century had never faced with full candour. Chief among them was his consideration of the question of the sources of doctrinal authority in the Church, surely one of the most delicate issues which the rising national sovereignties had to determine. This problem Hobbes attacked by reference to his central position that the prime responsibility of the state is the maintenance of order and peace. Actions spring from opinions, and in so far as the agencies of government can do so the sovereign should undertake to control and guide those instrumentalities which form and direct opinion. Without question the most important of these agencies is the Church, which by its pretensions to ghostly knowledge and power exerts a profound influence over the mass of men. The Church therefore must be controlled, must, indeed, be formed by the sovereign lest it undo the very structure of sovereignty.⁴

¹ Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, *Works*, II, 212-213.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 218-219, *et passim*.

³ Hallam supplies an interesting analysis on this point, *Introduction to the Literature of Europe, etc.* (Boston, 1864), III, 170.

⁴ Hobbes, *Seven philosophical problems*, *Works*, VII, 5.

It is evident, in terms of this view, that the state must exert an intimate and decisive control over the doctrinal formulation which gives the Church content and which determines its capacity for good or ill service to the state. That authority which adjudges interpretations of doctrine may truly be denominated sovereign in any commonwealth. Certainly we may agree that when private men are permitted to form their own judgments, to worship without restraint, and to gather factions by the magnet of supernatural pretensions, the fabric of ordered society will shortly be dissolved into a natural anarchy.¹ Hence we may say that absolute control of the institutions created to canalize the religious emotion is a necessary condition of sovereignty.

This position, Hobbes maintained, is soundly based. Our very confidence that the scriptures are the Word of God proceeds from our trust in an authority which has so instructed us. In divine as in civil matters we may be sure that the collective wisdom of the Church is a better guide than the specious tuition of revelation or the uncertain gropings of the individual reason.² We have previously seen that the sovereign orders and maintains the formal worship of the Church; it follows logically and necessarily that the capacity for judging what "doctrines are fit for peace, and to be taught the subjects" is inseparably a capacity of sovereignty.³ The right of the prince to order doctrine and to define religious truth is absolute. Indeed, it is the *sine qua non* of sovereignty since "doctrines repugnant to peace, can no more be true, than peace and concord can be against the law of nature." When men are so loosely governed that they are tempestuous and zealous in the defence of truth and in the advancement of their opinions, the commonwealth is factually in a state of war and dissolution.⁴

Nor can it be argued that the sovereign's control of the

¹ Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, Works, II, 293.

² Hobbes, Thomas, *Human nature, or the fundamental elements of policy* (L., 1650), in Works, IV, 66.

³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 537; Hobbes, *An answer to . . . Dr. Bramhall*, Works, IV, 364-365; Hobbes, *Considerations upon the reputation, loyalty, manners, and religion of Thomas Hobbes, etc.* (L., 1662), in Works, IV, 433.

⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 164-165; cf. Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, Works, II, 78.

Church and its clergy is unjustified either in natural or in divine law. We must at all times remember that the king exercises his authority by *jure divino*, whereas the clergy enjoy their capacity by derivation, by *jure civili*.¹ In point of fact the king as head of the Church possesses capacity to perform all pastoral functions, which he has delegated to the clergy because of the press of burdensome civil responsibilities.² The sovereign, therefore, may delegate his spiritual authority to an extent which he himself determines, and he may at his own pleasure recall it. There is no confusion in the sovereign's mind concerning the ghostly power or the Church Invisible. No greater responsibility rests upon him than to mould men by a public worship into reasonable conformity with what he conceives the Kingdom of Christ to be.³ The determination of the civil state therefore defines orthodoxy, and the opinions which the sovereign appoints cannot possibly be heretical. Orthodoxy and the very structure of the Church are matters of public law.

Having vested in sovereignty the capacity for ordering both the formal worship and the doctrines of the Church, Hobbes had laid firmly the basis of his argument concerning uniformity of worship. The state may appoint those doctrines which are "to be held and professed concerning the nature of God and His operations,"⁴ and it may order and require such worship, which may be defined as an outward sign of honour to God, as 'the public reason shall determine and desire.⁵ Worship, Hobbes carefully maintains, consists only of formal attitudes which are believed to honour God.⁶ It "proceeds from our duty, and is directed according to our capacity, by those rules of honour, that reason dictateth to be done by the weak to the more potent."⁷ We may say, in brutal brief, that it springs from fear.⁸

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 540.

² *Ibid.*, Works, III, 541-542; Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, Works, II, 296-297.

³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 578-579, et vide Stephen's analysis, *Hobbes*, 222-223.

⁴ Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, Works, II, 219; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 444.

⁵ Hobbes, *De corpore politico*, Works, IV, 214.

⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 348-349.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Works, III, 350.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Works, III, 353.

But the public worship which the state enjoins imposes no undue burden upon the religious conscience. It is to be regarded as a function of citizenship in which men participate as obedient subjects;¹ if they decline to honour God in its observance they at least honour the sovereign. Furthermore, by the very definition of sovereignty this public expression of worship must be uniform. When "many sorts of worship be allowed, proceeding from the different religions of private men, it cannot be said that there is any public worship, nor that the commonwealth is of any religion at all."² Hobbes is evidently concerned not so much with the propriety of the religious system imposed by the state as with the grave danger which ensues to the state when sectarianism remains uncontrolled. The private views of the subject and his private worship lie beyond the province of sovereignty, but public worship must be regarded as a political action which evidences either loyalty or sedition. Hobbes bound institutional religion by sovereign impositions which destroyed not only its character but its meaning. And the evidence is abundant that this was very precisely his intention. Worship was by his system of thought so formalized that even false worship could be defined as a matter of no religious consequence, but a moral action of political moment. For by such an action we signify our civil obedience, which is an act of a moral nature.³

The weight of Hobbes's argument becomes clear when he defines very explicitly the distinction between belief, which is private, and obedience, which is a matter of civil law. "To obey," he wrote, "is to do or forbear as one is commanded, and depends on the will; but to believe, depends not on the will, but on the providence and guidance of our hearts that are in the hands of Almighty God."⁴ Hence belief does not lie within the possible jurisdiction of the state, which possesses no certain instruments for its determination. But, the philosopher ominously suggested, it is probable that an enlightened

¹ Hobbes, Thomas, *Behemoth: the history of the causes of the civil wars in England* (L., 1679), in *Works*, VI, 217, 221.

² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, *Works*, III, 355.

³ Attention should be called to the remarkable discussion of this matter in Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, *Works*, II, 221-225.

⁴ Hobbes, *An answer to . . . Dr. Bramhall*, *Works*, IV, 339.

sovereign can by careful policy exercise a powerful influence upon the structure of belief.¹ Men are persuaded to belief by an authority which they trust and which has no ulterior purpose in accomplishing their deception. Hence they will be more inclined to follow the instruction of the state than the leadership of a factious and ambitious clergy. Hobbes cuts away the ground of private judgment and of religion itself when he maintains by arguments drawn both from history and from logic that the ultimate authority underlying our belief is to be found in the law that says it is true, that belief is in the last analysis moulded and fixed by the habitual patterns of thought and worship by which the state controls our religious expression.² Here indeed is a complete Erastianism which, Hobbes maintained against Bramhall, though it may vitiate the zeal and strength of religion ensures to the Christian world the peace, order, and stability for which it has so long striven. It would seem clear that Hobbes sought not the zealous uniformity of a Laud, but a sovereign uniformity which would be applied with the express purpose of squeezing from religious institutions the fertile essence of faith. This is indeed strong and daring thought for his or any age.

It would seem evident that Hobbes sought to deliver the church entirely into the hands of the state. It may be argued, in fact, that he made the sovereign absolute in order to establish in law and theory the capacities by which religious divisions could at last be mastered and the religious preoccupation brought under a firm control. With an almost obsessive insistence Hobbes charged that those who require liberty of conscience and worship seek nothing else than the imposition upon others of the sovereignty of their own opinions.³ The thrust of the philosopher's thought was carefully directed towards the destruction of forces which not only had weakened civil society but had defiled the state and civilization by barbarous persecution. It was from zeal and disorder that Hobbes was in his many volumes seeking an avenue of escape. In one sense it may be argued that he made the state absolute in

¹ It will have been observed that he constantly recurs to this possibility.

² Hobbes, *An answer to . . . Dr. Bramhall, Works*, IV, 340.

³ Hobbes, *De corpore politico, Works*, IV, 188.

order to liberate the individual. When sovereignty is divided and torn by clashing particles of power the individual is likely to be overwhelmed by caprice, disorder, persecution, and savagery. Even under a tyranny he who leads a retired and modest life is free from all danger.¹ Society is safest when liberty—liberty from civil war and clerical pretensions—belongs to the state itself, and the ultimate liberty of the individual is gained by the surrender of his personal freedom to a corporate liberty. When the sovereign is absolute we gain by the centralization of power freedom for our own pursuits, scope for the wandering quest of the mind, and that security which must form the basis of all sane and reasoned thought.

Hobbes discovered a kind of tolerance in the state which his prodigious intellect had created. He secured at least a negative liberty by declaring religion to be a matter of indifference spiritually and by reposing it upon carefully hewn pillars of policy. The ghosts of persecution and bigotry flee before the relentless march of his political and moral conceptions. Yet Hobbes secured religious tolerance by paying a price far greater than history required his own generation to pay. The philosopher who denounced the ecclesiastical phantoms with such acid periods was himself slaying phantoms with a mighty sword. For Hobbes was seeking to annihilate an intolerance, a zeal, and an ecclesiastical power which men of acuter perception and surer balance realized were already expiring before the chilly winds of indifference. Hobbes misread the history of the future by his gloomy brooding on the history of the past. He surrendered the human conscience and the human integrity to a power which his reason told him would be at once sane, tolerant, and, in the last analysis, moral. He weakened the last areas which men held sacred against the ever-mounting power of a civil Leviathan. In his desperate effort to destroy intolerance he created the possibility of a new and more terrible intolerance that would lack the ethical end which, to a degree at least, ennobled the search of the Middle Ages for an organic society.

The roots of Hobbes's distrust of the religious emotion and, indeed, the sources of his theory of sovereignty, may best be

¹ Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, *Works*, II, 132-134.

discovered by considering in some detail his analysis of the dangers which vital religion holds for society. He feared and detested above all other things the temper and objectives of sectarian fanaticism. Any state which fails to impose restraints upon inordinate zeal, and to Hobbes all zeal was inordinate, stands in mortal danger of annihilation. The clash of sectarian opinions and ambitions arouses the most treacherous animosities and engenders a fanatical piety which must be denominated madness.¹ No war is so vicious and destructive as that waged between sects of the same religion.² When the firm hand of sovereignty is for a moment loosed the dormant madness of zeal, enthusiasm, and inspiration crystallizes into factions and sects ever ready to grasp the sword in the prosecution of their monstrous delusions.³ The prudent ruler will seek with vigilant care to keep the delusions of fanaticism immobilized in the individuals of his realm; he will act with expedition and ruthless decision when points of coagulation appear. In this persuasion we find the essential meaning of Hobbes's theory of uniformity. The religious preoccupations of the individual, he taught, are unfortunate but not dangerous, just as is the naturally anarchistic and destructive political instinct of mankind. But it is the end of sovereignty to protect society against the divisive consequences which follow when such fanaticisms gain institutional organization.

Hobbes's almost psychopathic fear of fanaticism and his profound distrust of religion were rooted in his interpretation of the English Civil War. His theory of sovereignty and his masterly subordination of religion to the state flow from the uncertainties and fears which a revolutionary period had imposed upon a retiring and sensitive intelligence. The strength of his conviction that the war had been caused by the lax control of sectarian fanaticism was responsible for a brilliant but completely distorted historical judgment concerning the origins of the revolution. Basically, he maintained that the war had been foredoomed when the state failed to

¹ Hobbes, *An answer to . . . Dr. Bramhall, Works*, IV, 328.

² Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments, Works*, II, 7-8.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 138-319, 163-164: *et cf.* Hobbes, *De corpore politico, Works*, IV, 169.

discipline strictly the anarchistic consequences of the Reformation. "For after the Bible was translated into English, every man, nay, every boy and wench, that could read English, thought they spoke with God Almighty . . . and every man became a judge of religion, and an interpreter of the scriptures to himself."¹ Individual opinions and dissent crystallized into fanatical sects which belied and defiled the very nature of sovereignty.² When these vigorous and intolerant factions found ultimate reflection in Parliament sovereignty was endangered and the Civil War became inevitable.³ As a political realist Hobbes lent almost grudging admiration to what he regarded as a deliberate plot, beautifully manipulated under the guise of religious compulsion, to destroy the sovereign. Cromwell, he wrote, came to power by welding under his own leadership the burst fragments of sovereignty and then confirmed his authority by destroying the Presbyterians as skilfully as they had assisted him in the ruin of the king.⁴

The lessons of the past must guide those who would seek to govern men. Society is alive with a ferment of anarchy and rebellion which it must be the constant study of sovereignty to discipline and control. In politics the price of relaxation is destruction. And above all other enemies of the sovereign the clergy with their claim to inspiration and their natural arrogance are the most dangerous. These factious spirits must be harnessed by authority to ends which, though they may not be religious, are at least constructively civil. Religion, Hobbes all but says, must be destroyed as a vital force in human life if ordered society is to exist. These were the harsh but reasoned conclusions which the philosopher reached from the study in too short perspective of the English Civil War.

Hobbes subjected the clergy to a bitter and savage attack at every point where his thought could be brought to bear upon them. It was his constant aim to devise means by which they might be controlled, by which they might be made servants of the state, and by which their "ghostly influence" might be undermined. He was deeply persuaded that their

¹ Hobbes, *Behemoth*, Works, VI, 190.

² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 168.

³ Hobbes, *Behemoth*, Works, VI, 167, 192-193.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Works, VI, 375.

power was based upon a kind of magic and that their influence was derived from the hysterical and irrational obedience which they could impose through their claim to revelation, substantiated by pretended and fabricated miracles. These sources of strength are capable of infinite exploitation and in a true sense expose the state, whose foundations are rational and natural, to a most dangerous and unfair competition. Hence Hobbes attacked the claims of revelation and the authority of miracles with an incisive daring hardly equalled before the age of Hume.

A miracle, Hobbes submitted, may be defined as a work of God, lying outside the operations of natural law, which makes manifest the mission of an extraordinary minister for the salvation of the elect.¹ Such a spiritual phenomenon is always possible, but it must be marked by transcendent clarity and by infallible evidences of veracity. It must, in fine, gain consent in the judgment of all men by the very credibility of its nature. Thus a private miracle or a personal revelation has no general signification whatsoever. We should recall that sanctity may be feigned and that that which appears marvellous may be explicable to another.² The entire supernatural structure of ecclesiastical pretensions, Hobbes would suggest, stands exposed to criticism of the most compelling sort. When we say that a man speaks by supernatural inspiration we mean nothing more than that "he finds an ardent desire to speak in some strong opinions of himself, for which he can allege no natural and sufficient reason." Hence the claim of revelation is ever the refuge of the deluded and the vicious.

Most miracles, Hobbes concludes, either are imagined because we possess a faulty understanding of natural law or are deliberate frauds perpetrated in order to entrap the credulous.³ Those who claim divine revelation as the charter of their defiance of the sovereign are anarchists who rebel against the authority of the state. Since "he whose nonsense appears to be a divine speech, must necessarily seem to be inspired from above," these men prey upon ignorance and invade sovereignty with subtle and incendiary weapons.⁴ This erratic

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 432.

² *Ibid.*, Works, III, 273.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, III, 434-435.

⁴ Hobbes, *Philosophical rudiments*, Works, II, 157.

and explosive element in religion must be carefully and rigidly controlled. Hence Hobbes would argue that every claim of revelation and divine guidance must be submitted to the reasoned wisdom of the Church, and by that Hobbes meant the state.¹ In these transcendent questions "we are not every one, to make our own private reason, or conscience, but the public reason, that is, the reason of God's supreme lieutenant, judge."² This does not mean that the private man may not retain confidence in the validity of a revelation; the state cannot touch his mind here, but when the state has ruled on the question of truth the subject must accept its teaching in his formal worship or submit himself to the pain of martyrdom.

Hobbes likewise gravely weakened the independent power and capacity of institutional religion by a rigorous analysis, from the point of view of history and of law, of the meaning and treatment of heresy. He carefully traced the history of the term to show that it did not in Greek philosophy signify opprobrium and that in the primitive Church opinions were so wide-spread that the appellations "orthodox" and "heretical" were purely relative.³ Hence the term has far more historical than absolute meaning. We can say nothing more than that heresy indicates "a singularity of doctrine or opinion contrary to the doctrine of another man."⁴ Furthermore, we should bear in mind that in the early Church no coercive punishment was employed or contemplated in the treatment of heresy. Punishment was first introduced by the civil state in the interests of securing order and hence is strictly subject to the politic determinations of the sovereign.⁵ In fact, even the penalty of excommunication was in the early Church employed rather for the correction of manners than for the regulation of opinion.⁶ When the censure of the Church is not fortified by the punitive decision of the state, it has no capacity for

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 435, 274-275.

² *Ibid.*, Works, III, 436-437, et cf. 362-365.

³ Hobbes, Thomas, *An historical narrative concerning heresy, and the punishment thereof* (L., 1680), in Works, IV, 390.

⁴ Hobbes, Thomas, *A dialogue between a philosopher and a student of the common laws of England* (L., 1681), in Works, VI, 97.

⁵ Hobbes, *Historical narrative concerning heresy*, Works, IV, 399.

⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 504.

working harm on any man. It should be strictly understood therefore that the determination and punishment of heresy are prerogatives of the civil state, which employs the indicated penalty as an instrument for the maintenance of civil order.¹

A serious confusion has arisen in this important matter because during the Middle Ages the Church was rebellious and secured by arrogation powers which belong properly to the sovereign. In England it was not until the reign of Elizabeth that the state attained its final integrity by regaining control of this segment of sovereignty, though the queen probably did not find it advisable to constitute a legal basis for the punishment of heresy by death.² The cold fact is, Hobbes contended, that the gravity of an heresy depends entirely upon the capacity and might of the authority which is contravened by dissidence. For heresy becomes significant in law only when opinion breaks out into a rash of action; it involves no sin so long as it is maintained discreetly and offers no injury to the civil commonwealth.³ These are the solid realities which the chatter of the clergy and the dangerous zeal of the fanatics must not be allowed to obscure. The state must control with an extreme rigour the instinct of persecution which is nothing else than a recrudescence of natural barbarism. "So fierce are men . . . in dispute, where either their learning or power is debated, that they never think of the laws, but as soon as they are offended, they cry out, *crucifige*."⁴ They seek constantly to promote the sovereignty of private opinions by an intolerance which is dangerous and rebellious.⁵ This explosive force must be controlled by the sovereign, who should determine not only what heresy is, but how and when it should be punished.⁶ Moreover, Hobbes very explicitly indicated, the

¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 547; Hobbes, *De corpore politico*, Works, IV, 197-199.

² Hobbes, *Historical narrative concerning heresy*, Works, IV, 405-406; Hobbes, *A dialogue between a philosopher and a student of the common laws*, Works, VI, 105-106.

³ Hobbes, *A dialogue between a philosopher and a student of the common laws*, Works, VI, 102.

⁴ Hobbes, *Historical narrative concerning heresy*, Works, IV, 407.

⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 90.

⁶ Hobbes, *Behemoth*, Works, VI, 175-176; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Works, III, 579.

ruler must make it evident that his action is undertaken not in the interests of the pursuit of the phantom of absolute truth but of civil order.

Hobbes, it may be said in summary, had dealt a devastating blow to religious pretensions already weakened by a violent internecine strife which belied at once the organic nature of the Church in the modern world and the possibility of attaining an absolute body of truth. It is evident that he held institutional religion in low esteem and that he sought to weaken it by every argument that history, anthropology, logic, and philosophy could lend to his powerful pen. His criticism was the more effective because he accepted the essential postulates of Christianity only to shatter them with the very texts that had for so long been bent to the service of the Church. Hobbes argued in essence that history proves that the institutional claims of organized religion are most dangerous for a human society, itself barely lifted by sovereignty above an awful abyss of barbarism. He consequently brought to conclusion the last grim deduction of Erastianism—that religion must be disciplined to the service of the state, that the steely spine of its independence must be broken, and that its function and definition must become a portion of civil law. English thought had been sloping in this direction for a century as men became sensitively aware that the state itself stood in grave danger from the disorder and persecution which fanaticism may engender. But Hobbes effected a tight and binding sovereignty against a danger which was already at the moment of his writing more illusory than real. Religious indifference was speedily to damp down the fires of bigotry; religious toleration under the protection of the state was already generally entertained by Englishmen as the solution of a problem which had harassed mankind with a peculiar gravity since the Reformation had exploded into fragments a religious society that was in conception at least organic. Thomas Hobbes wrote too late and too well. His work was to be the quarry from which men, bent not upon religious toleration but upon a civil tyranny, were to find rich and solid veins of thought to serve their purposes. Hobbes stands convicted of a naïve and implicit trust in the beneficence and ultimate morality of those who

wield an absolute political power—a naïveté quite as ridiculous and dangerous as that of those who struggled blindly, unsuccessfully, and often cruelly to attain in this world the absolute sovereignty of truth.

6. THE MINOR ERASTIAN THEORISTS

The minor Erastian thinkers displayed in almost as extreme form the hard structure of a lay determination to bring the disintegrative forces of religious enthusiasm and intolerance under the firm control of a civil government which should by definition divest itself of all sectarian commitments. It would seem, indeed, that when we explore the obscurer reaches of the thought of any group of this period, we discover under the protection of anonymity or obscurity a deeper distrust of clerical zeal and a firmer devotion to religious liberty. Many of these lesser known writers betray the profound disillusionment of men who had fought in the ranks of Puritanism against Laud only to discover in the days of the Westminster Assembly that Puritanism, crystallized as Presbyterianism, was quite as dangerous an enemy to religious freedom as the episcopal intolerance which had so recently been overthrown. Others display a nostalgic yearning for the Erastian and reasoned religious policy of the Elizabethan government; even as they wrote of the Protectorate they thought in terms of an age that had gone. But, whatever the source of their Erastianism, these men were firmly joined in their devotion to the principles of religious toleration.

In still another area of thought, in another segment of opinion, therefore, we discover a dark and angry hostility to the clergy, an hostility that was to attain its maturity in the cynicism and indifference of the Restoration. There was a firm conviction that the principal cause for discord in the church and disorder in the state through all of Christian history had been a confusion concerning the limits of ecclesiastical power.¹ The clergy have constantly sought to encroach upon the sovereignty of the state by advancing pretensions

¹ Norwood, Richard, *Considerations tending to remove the present differences, and to settle unity, peace, and piety for the present and future* (L., 1646), 3.

which, while phrased in religious terminology, have as their object the fastening of a clerical dominance upon the ruler and subject alike. In England, it was suggested, this terrible disposition had reached its final maturity in the bigoted effort of the Presbyterian clergy to rivet an unwarranted ecclesiastical system upon the nation by the brutal power of the sword.¹ Religion in England, one blunt Erastian wrote, has been despoiled by four great factions which must be compelled by a strong and tolerant government to reconcile the texts which they have perverted to their own factious ends.² The clergy, another writer suggested, have united in an almost seditious effort to "promote and carry on their Scottish interest" in England.³ They have undermined Parliament's military strength, have sought to poison the army, and have subtly endeavoured to influence Parliament itself. They stand convicted of a "design generally carried on . . . to bring us again into Egyptian bondage, to keep up and maintain the oppression of tithes; and to set up themselves and their classical Diana by civil sanctions."⁴ These false followers of Christ have been the steady and ingenious enemies of all liberty, whether civil or religious. England has been cruelly deceived by those in whom it reposed moral and intellectual confidence. This clerical caste enlisted enthusiastically in the cause of liberty only so long as episcopacy stood in the way of its own greater intolerance. But once prelacy had been reduced the clergy began to "shew their teeth."⁵

These sentiments, which might be almost indefinitely expanded from available materials, argue a wide-spread disillusionment in England, already deepening into outright scepticism or a weary indifference. These writers argue to the same end, that no clerical faction can be trusted and that religion can be preserved only by imposing upon it an absolute

¹ Nedham, Marchamont, *The case of the common-wealth of England, stated, etc.* (L., 1650), 62.

² C., W., *A discourse for a king and parliament, etc.* (L., 1660), 16-17.

³ *The copy of a letter sent out of Wiltshire to a gentleman in London; wherein is laid open the dangerous designs of the clergy, in reference to the approaching Parliament, etc.* (L., 1654), in Ludlow, Edmund, *Memoirs, etc.* (ed. by C. H. Firth) (Oxford, 1894) I, 545.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 546.

⁵ Nedham, *The case of the common-wealth*, 62.

and tolerant lay control. The clergy must be compelled by civil authority to forgo their dabbling in politics and to renounce their reliance upon the instruments of compulsion. They must be forcibly restored to their true calling of persuading and leading men to a larger knowledge of truth with the spiritual resources with which Christ has endowed them.¹ Certainly, another writer gloomily concluded, no religious sect has ever shown any disposition to embrace toleration by its own free choice. Even the more recent sects do "not allow that liberty to their owne disciples, but subtly silenced that freedome . . . which with no small appearance of sanctity, they preached abroad in others dominions; abhorring to finde that confusion growing in their owne private conventicles, which they plentifully sowed in other countreys."² Responsible men can only conclude that the clergy are the persistent enemies of religious liberty, the subtle and dangerous borers that undermine the structure of civil authority, and the despoilers of the spiritual character of Christ's religion. Zealous clerical leadership is a destructive and irresponsible engine when loosed; no state and no church stand safe so long as it is not carefully lashed down by a sovereign lay power.

An Erastian, writing in 1659, exhibited all of the rancour and disillusionment so wide-spread in England. The intolerance of the sects, the inordinate ambition of the clergy, and the intemperate zeal of the fanatics, he submitted, had been responsible for the forfeiture of the gains of successful revolution. Cromwell, whose instincts and administration had been tolerant, had vainly struggled to lead and master these disrupting forces. In retrospect, it appears probable that more would have been gained had the Protector ruled with the iron might which he possessed. Divisions, intolerance, and religious hatred have taken their toll in the precious coin of liberty. One is led to wonder, indeed, whether any nation so distracted and torn by religious animosity can boast the title of Christian. The sober man is forced to enquire whether "all this jangling

¹ Norwood, *Considerations tending to remove the present differences*, 8.

² *Liberty of conscience confuted: by arguments of reason and policie, Delivered in discourse betwixt a Turke, and a Christian, etc.* (n.pl., 1648), 17. Textual evidence would indicate that this tract was very possibly written by a Roman Catholic who posed as a thoroughgoing Erastian.

in the Church of Christ do not favour pride and malice, and . . . the unquietness of spirit; and be not the ready way to make our breaches wider than they are.”¹ The clergy, when vested with a complete and effective liberty, have found no better use for their freedom than to destroy and invade the state in an effort to forge anew the weapons of persecution. They have by the terrible record of their own actions formally denied that their power is “perswasive and prophetic, suitable to the subject upon which they work.”² It stands evident, not only in reason, but by the ghastly failure in England of a policy which extended a liberty of conscience predicated upon ecclesiastical autonomy, that the state cannot be preserved nor true liberty of conscience maintained until the anarchy of religious zeal is broken and the institutional ambitions of the sects are restrained by the firm and Erastian hand of the civil authority.

These sombre reflections disclose the sources of the powerful support enjoyed by the brilliant Erastian group in Parliament. The Erastians had arrived at conclusions concerning the religious problem in England which broke sharply with the historical past and which presupposed, in point of fact, a lay definition of Christianity that bore but vague resemblance to its traditional institutional forms. These thinkers were intent upon the attainment of two ends: political stability and religious toleration. They were wholly careless of the disastrous consequence which the attainment of such objectives might have upon the evangelical vitality and the doctrinal purity of the Church. The Erastians stated bluntly that since Parliament had demonstrated in the past that it could order religion, it might therefore impose whatever religious settlement it desired upon England.³ The clergy has no power beyond persuasion and must be forced to employ those resources which are peculiar to its vocation. Compulsion belongs to the state and

¹ *Twenty seven queries relating to the general good of the three nations* (L., 1659), 7.

² Norwood, *Considerations tending to remove the present differences*, 8.

³ Ball, William, *Constitutio liberi populi. Or, the rule of a free-born people* (L., 1646), 17. Ball was a member of Parliament, returned for Abingdon in 1645. Though a moderate Puritan in his own religious faith, he was an outspoken Erastian.

to the state alone. Peter Wentworth thundered: "If princes embrace the truth you must obey them; if they pursue truth, you must abide them."¹ The people, Ball maintained, are bound to accept the religious determinations of Parliament in so far as they can do so in conscience, and, if they cannot, to submit to any penalties which the common wisdom of England in Parliament may impose.²

But there is no threat to tolerance, no attack on comprehension involved in this solution of the religious dilemma. For the parliamentary determination of the nature of the Establishment carries its own guarantee of latitude and comprehension. Toleration is in far safer hands when left to the lay sanity of Parliament than when it remains exposed to the merciless and fratricidal ambitions of rival and completely intolerant sects. Thus Fiennes warned the House of Commons in the early days of the Long Parliament that England had all but been destroyed by a rigid clerical definition of the Church, though God had endowed men with latitude or had left them free. "If men, though otherwise good, will turn ceremony into substance, and make the Kingdom of Christ to consist in circumstances, in discipline, and in forms; if uniformity in these things dissolve unity among brethren; and if they carry their animosities to so high a degree of asperity, that if one say *Sibboleth* instead of *Shibboleth* it shall be accounted ground enough to cut his throat,"³ destructive forces of bigotry are thereby unleashed to the ruin of public order and the ultimate wasting of the Church itself. History teaches, and reason confirms the view, that it is far better to entrust religious liberty and the guidance of the Church to the calm and reasonable sovereignty of the state. Nor will the civil authority betray that trust or contrive by plots and intrigues to undermine that latitude so essential to its own preservation. Parliament, we may be sure, will employ no

¹ [Wentworth, Sir Peter], *A pack of Puritans. . . . As also a defence of the authority of princes and parliaments to intermeddle with matters of religion, etc.* (L., 1641), 47.

² Ball, *Constitutio liberi populi*, 17-18.

³ Fiennes, Nathaniel, *Speech in Long Parliament*, in Brook, Benjamin, *The History of Religious Liberty from the First Propagation of Christianity in Britain, to the Death of George III, etc.* (L., [1821]), I, 522. For a fuller discussion of Fiennes's Erastianism, vide Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 488-491; III, 82-83.

other weapons than persuasion and clemency in its effort to bring men and women within the broad limits of the Church which it creates.¹ For a parliamentary settlement of religion will, because of the diversity of religious opinion amongst its members and in consequence of the secular interest which dominates its decisions, be a tolerant and comprehensive settlement.

The parliamentary solution of the religious problem will be firmly predicated upon the objectives of curing the fatal divisions which distract the state and of extending to all men as large a liberty as is consistent with ordered government. So bitter have been the wars of the clashing sectarian factions that the civil authority will seek to drown intolerance and rigid zeal in a deep and broad sea of comprehension. It has become all too evident to sober and responsible men that the animosity excited by intolerant zeal is destroying the political and social order. It may be, indeed, that the time has come for the laity to set up a religious council, embracing all points of view, which will define the Church of England so broadly as to remove all possibility of further intolerance.² The state will upon assuming this authority deal firmly but impartially with each sect. The magistrate will maintain the peace by severely punishing any breach of tolerance, and he will be guided by the self-evident principle that toleration is the "grand preservative of publique quiet; whereas persecutions for matter of religion have ever been all the world over the great incentives of sedition."³ The state, another writer submitted, must lay firm hands upon the volatile question of religion. Peace, commerce, and administrative efficiency have been sacrificed in England in the pursuit of abstract goals that can never be attained by mortal men. The ruinous brawls of the sects can be quieted only by the restoration of a strong and, this writer held, monarchical government that will resolve the religious quarrel by imposing a toleration which removes it finally from politics.⁴ England might well learn from Holland the incomparable advantages of an Erastian tolerance, for there "the magistrate

¹ Ball, *Constitutio liberi populi*, 18.

² *Twenty seven queries*, 7-8.

³ Nedham, *The case of the common-wealth*, 91.

⁴ C., W., *A discourse for a king and parliament*, 11-15.

takes a stricter course, the ministers dare not busie themselves . . . in state affaires.”¹ The sharp whip of the magistrate must be employed in order to bring an ambitious and arrogant clergy, too long deluded by visions of power, to a realization of its spiritual responsibility.

The state, then, orders and reforms religion in the interests of its own preservation. But, happily, the peace and tolerance which it imposes will redound to the infinite advantage of religion itself. We may be sure that there will always be infinite variety and diversity in religious expression and faith so long as religion is vital. The Erastian policy of toleration ensures this necessary vitality while rendering the sects harmless to the state and to each other. It will be the relentless purpose of the prudent government to sheath the persecuting sword which has been defiled by the blood of innocent men and women. Such a state, Marchamont Nedham heatedly proclaimed, will bring sharply to heel those “great pretenders of nationall uniformity in religion, those high imperious uniformity-mongers, that would have men take measure of all opinions by their own.” These men are “the greatest disturbers of states and kingdoms” and the mortal enemies of the liberty of conscience which Christ ordained for all of humanity.²

These Erastian sentiments were widely held not only by lay writers and a powerful group in Parliament, but by the Cromwellian judiciary. In case after case in the assize courts it is evident that the justices, who were drawn from a profession almost uniformly Erastian, sought by every possible expedient to mitigate clerical intolerance in the interests of the state. Two examples will suffice. Mr. Justice Windham entertained at the Lincoln assize of 1658 the plea of numerous parishioners who had been barred from the Lord’s Supper and whose children had not been baptized. The Justice severely reprimanded the clergy and admonished them to interpret their spiritual duties more liberally and tolerantly. He warned them that they had flouted the unrepealed statute of 1 Edward VI in using their spiritual office in order to force men into a conformity with

¹ *The copy of a letter sent out of Wiltshire to a gentleman in London*, in Ludlow, *Memoirs*, I, 548.

² Nedham, *The case of the common-wealth*, 91.

their private opinions and ordered them to desist from such intolerant practices.¹ At about the same time a minister from Aston-on-Trent, Thomas Palmer, was charged at the Derby assize with a similar offence. The Justice warned him that he incurred grave risks by his illiberal refusal to administer the sacraments and counselled the plaintiffs to withhold their tithes so long as they were denied the offices of the Church.² In both cases it is apparent that the justices were endeavouring to employ every influence in support of the administrative tolerance which the Protectorate had sought to uphold in England against almost insuperable odds.³ The grim spectre of Erastianism walked abroad, as the Protectorate drew to its tragic close, to haunt the dreams of the zealous and intolerant who bore so heavy a responsibility for the failure of the revolutionary experiments.

The Erastians contended, almost incidentally, that the legally imposed tolerance which they recommended would likewise have beneficent spiritual effects. The lay mind must restore religion to its true function and must revive that latitude which characterizes Christ's Church. It is indeed a lamentable commentary upon our charity that we define the bounds of faith so narrowly that many of those who will not allow one another the right to breathe and live upon earth will nevertheless, through God's greater mercy, meet in heaven.⁴ The destructive and malevolent intolerance of humanity must be chastened in its own behalf. The world has been consumed and charity violated by wrathful persecution for matters wholly inconsequential for salvation. The state must guarantee to all men who profess the broadly defined fundamentals of Christianity complete liberty of conscience in an Establishment so comprehensively conceived that it embraces all good and upright men.⁵ This Church will in all humility dedicate itself to the pursuit of truth and will as the charter of its freedom ensure

¹ *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, clxxxiii, 136, i, ii, iii.

² *Ibid.*, clxxxiii, 136, iv.

³ For other instances of the Erastian temper of the judiciary, *vide ante*, 254-255.

⁴ Fiennes, *Speech in the Long Parliament*, in Brook, *History of Religious Liberty*, I, 522.

⁵ Ball, *Constitutio liberi populi*, 20-22.

and encourage all men in that quest even though their weak capacities and their fallible judgments lead them into paths which to our limited vision appear beside the way.

This solution to the religious problem which has for centuries harassed the state and troubled society stands, then, above all reproach in reason and in policy. And, finally, it may be said that history itself lends defence to an Erastian toleration. In Egypt, Nedham recalled, men of four religions dwell together in peace and harmony under the firm protection of the state. It is customary in that country "for the more learned sort of them, to dispute with each other, and defend the opinions of their party" without rancour. For the certainty of toleration removes from religious discussion the possibility of dominance and the debilitating fear of persecution. In Japan and Turkey, too, divers religions are tolerated and peace is maintained without danger to the state. But, lamentably, Nedham reminded England, Christian states have only slowly and after the trial of war and disorder adopted the policy of legal toleration. It is most significant that wherever a trial has been made of liberty of worship an almost instantaneous peace has been attained, trade has prospered, and the state has gained infinitely in stability. England can scarcely ignore in her hour of decision the example of "the states of Holland, who by a prudent toleration of severall professions, have established themselves in such a measure of peace, plenty, and liberty, as is not to be equalled by any" other nation in Western Europe.¹

The thought of the Erastians is impressive not only because of the clarity and precision with which they probed the problems that harassed the seventeenth century, but because they concentrated into almost perfect focus all of the compelling arguments for religious toleration. They spoke for a large and powerful mass of opinion in England which had come for a variety of causes, in the main quite unconnected with religion, to disown without reservation the medieval ideal of an organic religious society. They argued well and conclusively the opinion that the quest for spiritual dominance, the search for and the imposition of an exclusive body of religious truth, was no longer possible or tolerable under the conditions which

¹ Nedham, *The case of the common-wealth*, 90-91.

govern the modern world. Yet in the full perspective of time one sees that there was a tragic flaw in the conclusions which seemed so inescapable to the later seventeenth century. Man, it may be held, was delivered by the triumph of Erastianism and indifference from the inquisitor of the Church to the hangman of the state. Religious toleration came, by and large, as the final concession, on the last front of a warfare that had raged for centuries, to the fact of sovereignty. The aims and the policy of the modern state, its own enlightened self-interest, guaranteed religious freedom, it is true. But it was only slowly that men came to realize, perhaps not fully until the twentieth century, that they had been delivered to a new master—a master unrestrained by moral aspirations and wanting in those ideals of an earlier society which could at least ennoble barbarism. Men in the sixteenth century seem, for reasons which our minds find it difficult to accept, to have died gladly for a faith; the complete sovereignty of the state has left man with few ideals for which he finds occasion to die—gladly.

F. THE RANK AND FILE: THE INARTICULATE

I. GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE THOUGHT OF THE RANK AND FILE

The historian, impressed with the political drama of the period of the Civil Wars and the Interregnum, is likely to forget that classes of men hitherto inarticulate were profoundly influenced by the ferment of ideas loosed during the revolutionary era. English writings prior to 1640 fall into rather clearly defined and conveniently ordered categories. Thought was moulded and formally expressed by educated men who, whatever differences may have divided them, spoke for classes which held at once the substance of property and of power in England. In particular, the consideration of the difficult and increasingly important problems so vitally connected with the question of religious toleration was by and large confined, in so far as literary survivals form a guide, to the clergy and to a well-educated and responsible group of lay thinkers. But very suddenly, in late 1640, the approach of a revolution quite as

important in the domain of thought as in the sphere of politics was heralded by a vast increase in the quantity of discussion and by a momentous change in the quality of discussion. It is highly significant that the great bulk of the new literature was concerned not so much with the constitutional problems which exercised the members at Westminster as with the grave issues raised in connection with rapidly spreading dissent.

We have had frequent occasion to emphasize the fact that the discussion and solution of the problem of religious toleration was taken out of clerical hands during the revolutionary period. It is quite as important to realize that the character of lay opinion and the quality of lay leadership likewise underwent a startling and historically significant change. The religious issues confronting England were so vitally important, so dramatic in their appeal, and so personal in their impact upon individual men and women that the hitherto restrained discussion suddenly overflowed the traditional banks to cut new and permanent channels in English thought. Literally hundreds of writers without learning, without position, and hitherto without influence entered the lists of controversy. These men were to rely upon common sense, upon mother wit, and upon an honest, if naïve, rationalism in propounding the solution which learning and piety had for so long sought to the pressing problems of religion in England. The thought of this group of men, hitherto inarticulate, was well if crudely hewn in quality, radical in its political implications, and uniformly tolerant in its temper. It is highly significant that as the historian descends into the dimmer depths of public opinion in England during these decades, he discovers an increasing tolerance, a larger charity, and a more bitter distrust of clerical leadership. In ordered times such lay opinion is disciplined and controlled by institutional agencies, but in revolutionary eras when the accustomed restraints have been relaxed this type of lay radicalism may decisively influence the seminal thought of a nation. Certainly it is not too much to say that the powerful and sustained attack of the rank and file upon clerical pretensions, ecclesiastical bigotry and rigidity, and every species of intolerance was of very great importance in securing in the thought of the nation the general conviction that some

scheme of religious toleration was at once a political and a religious necessity. The period of reaction following the Restoration never altered the decision that had been taken in that amorphous but important abstraction which for want of a better term we call the public consciousness; indeed, the very excesses of reaction confirmed the salutary nature of the decision.

The crude pamphlets, badly printed, casually written, and never proof-read, with which the inarticulate were so profoundly to affect English thought were likewise not without significance in the history of English letters. The style which such men unconsciously adopted proved to be a much more flexible and effective weapon of controversy than the involved and laboured cadences of the early seventeenth-century divines. These men wrote with a simple, strong, and nervous style, rich in homely simile, salty with an earthy humour, and deeply persuasive in its honesty and directness. They were without learning; they threw off too easily and lightly the weight which tradition and historical continuity normally imposes upon the discussion of institutional problems. The radical laymen ignored and by the very act repudiated the organic traditions which Protestantism had inherited from an older religious conception, not only because they found it absurd and inapplicable under contemporary conditions, but because they did not understand it. They had in the English Bible, now universally dispersed and widely read, a rich armoury of infallible argument which they were to use with a rough-and-ready pragmatism that distressed and frightened the responsible leaders of English thought. Texts were wrenched from their context, passages were polished to the ends of argument, and prophecies were bent to the support of contemporary discussion. These thinkers, quite as much as the subtle and ironic genius of a Hobbes, account for the disappearance of the Bible as the great source of political theory. But their work in the cause of religious liberty had been well done, and it may be argued that they restored the essential quality of Christianity by their steady insistence upon the spiritual nature of religion. At least they wrenched discussion and decision out of hands that were endeavouring to fabricate dogmatic and institutional structures

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that were unrelated to the religious and political realities of the modern world.

2. JOHN VERNON

The inarticulate thought of the revolutionary era is distinguished for its total mass and for the amazing uniformity of its defence of the principles of religious toleration. Few of the many pamphlets which have been considered possess enough distinction to warrant individual treatment; few of them are sufficiently ordered or systematic to merit particular consideration. The thought of the rank and file must therefore be analysed as a corpus. Two tracts, however, which make a substantial contribution in their own right, must first receive individual criticism.

An obscure writer, John Vernon,¹ published during the critical days in late 1648 a remarkable pamphlet entitled *The Swords Abuse Asserted: or, A Word to the Army*, in which he warned the military junto then apparently forming that it must scrupulously avoid a betrayal of the cause of liberty of conscience. England was in these troubled days seeking a new basis of sovereignty, and the insight which we have into the army debates at Putney reveals that the army chieftains were under very strong pressure from the hitherto inarticulate, now strongly organized in the army, to secure in the new constitution adequate guarantees for religious toleration.²

Vernon warned the army leaders that no stable government could ever be formed in England unless the principle of separation of church and state were accepted as the corner-stone of the new constitution. The Council must concern itself exclusively with laying the firm foundations of a civil state which will secure to all England a stable and equitable government. But this cannot be done unless it disowns without reservation all

¹ We are not able definitely to identify Vernon. It is probable that he was a native of Buckinghamshire and he described himself as for "sometimes a member of the army." It is possible that he was the John Vernon (b. 1608) who was graduated from Oxford B.A. in 1628 and M.A. in 1631. Further research into this problem of identification might yield fruitful results.

² Vide Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 119-131, for a discussion of these debates.

control over conscience, which, since the beginning of Christian history, has been the certain symbol of tyranny. "Oh let all that call themselves Christians beware," Vernon implored, "lest they cruelly contract upon themselves all the righteous blood that hath been shed since Abel, by justifying . . . restrictive power."¹ It has been the announced intent of an aroused nation to ensure the freedom of the religious conscience from the control of the state. England stands convinced that in spiritual matters "no terrestrial potentate hath a grain more title than the poorest peasant, nor is able to subdue the least of his own or anothers sins."²

The separation of the functions of church and state must be clean-cut and complete. Civil rulers, buttressed by the orthodox, have been loath to relinquish power in spiritual areas where they enjoy neither competency nor understanding. The struggle to emancipate the human spirit has been both slow and painful. It is at last generally admitted that no earthly power possesses the right to compel the conscience, but a dangerous reservation has been made, often by high-minded men, which would vest in the magistrate the power to restrain men from unchristian professions and idolatrous actions. This apparently innocent reservation, the sturdy Vernon argued, is as vicious as it is dangerous. In political reality no such distinction can be drawn between compulsion and restraint. Those men who do not heed the counsels of restraint will soon find themselves under the lash of compulsion. Restraint will speedily become so rigorous that "I worship as he worships, and so I feel his power."³ Furthermore, such a reservation upon unconditional liberty of worship vests in the state the power to define the actually hazy peripheral limits of Christianity. Such a capacity is bestowed by Christ upon no mortal man. Moreover, the intolerant spirit displays an amazing want of confidence in the power of the Word and the earnest preaching of Christ's ministers for the reduction of idolatry and error.⁴

Vernon pleaded for an absolute toleration of all religious groups, whether Christian or no, on the highly defensible

¹ Vernon, John, *The swords abuse asserted: or, a word to the army; shewing the weakness of carnal weapons in spiritual warfare, etc.* ([L.], 1648), 11-12.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

grounds that a restrictive power once granted cannot easily be limited. This position, advanced even for the period in which he wrote, was predicated upon a remarkable insight into the nature of both sovereignty and religion. The maturity of the writer's thought is further exhibited in a sweeping condemnation of every species of religious persecution. Men who were clearly Christian, however eccentric their profession may have been, have been condemned in England for the retention of heretical opinions. Persecution rests essentially upon the hideous assumption that the party which happens to enjoy political dominance may as a prerogative of its power likewise define the limits of religious truth. Competency in political matters, however, by no means ensures infallibility in religion.¹ This is the delusion which undergirds every coercive religious establishment and from which the tragic ghost of persecution has issued to haunt mankind.

The Church, Vernon taught, cannot possibly regain its vitality or recover its spiritual nature until every vestige of the persecuting philosophy has been disowned. Christ desires no unwilling worshippers in His Church and has commanded us to tolerate the free existence of heresy in order to ensure the purity of the faith of His followers. "A word of glad tidings, the gospel of peace, is that which he proclaims to poor idolaters; and this is the sword which he alone will allow of to reduce the rebellious, and make the worst of them a willing people in this day of his power."² Persuasion, example, and reasonable argument are the only instruments which can secure the conversion of the lost. We may be sure that "a powerful argument would soon subdue that noble part, when civil restraint would increase prejudice, and confirm obscurity."³ Reason constitutes the effective sword of the Christian Church. The pure and mature Church stands strong in its faith and unafraid of the puny waves of error that lap harmlessly at its impregnable foundations. The bestial tradition of persecution belongs only to the corrupt, the fearful, and the imperfect church which surrenders itself to the crushing arms of the civil magistrate.

Vernon dealt directly and frankly with the orthodox allegation that religious toleration would permit the most repre-

¹ Vernon, *The sword abuse*, 9.

² *Ibid.*, 10.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

hensible errors to flourish. This charge is in a sense true, but it does not militate against the necessity of toleration. Idolatry was punished amongst the Jews at the direct command of God. But under the gospel God, for Christ's sake, permits idolatry to go unpunished in order to accomplish the ultimate purposes of Christianity. Persons lost in error are to be won and saved by the agencies which Christ dedicated to that purpose. Any attempt to wound or restrain them, therefore, is a flagrant attack upon the Kingdom of Christ. No Christian who is secure in the grounds of his faith has anything to fear from the most hideous error, nor does a tolerant mien in any sense indicate approval of such error.

This refreshing and energetic argument afforded a broad and considered basis for Vernon's defence of religious liberty. "I would," he submitted, "have all Jews or heathens, or what ever ignorants are native, with all such forreign you invite to traf-fique and suffer to inhabit, as freely to converse as commerce with you, without restraint upon religious causes."¹ By such gentle courses alone may Christ's will be done among the lost. And, at the same time, the civil society itself will benefit infinitely when it is founded upon the firm principle of an absolute toleration. He who would deny this should "consider the flourishing estate of the Low Countries ever since they suffered every man to worship according to his conscience, and even the Jews themselves to worship in their publike synagogues."² Such a state knits together its citizens by the closest ties of loyalty. Every man will sacrifice himself to ensure its preservation since thereby he preserves himself. No factious group can rise to overthrow its sovereignty since they would thereby invade the interests and security of the whole. True religion and true citizenship unite to lead men and nations towards that freedom in religion which is their birthright and their security.

3. HENRY STUBBE, THE YOUNGER, 1632-1676

These tolerant sentiments were developed a decade later with even greater originality and with a keener sense of the

¹ Vernon, *The swords abuse*, 13.

² *Ibid.*, 14.

political realities by Henry Stubbe, an astute political thinker who was apparently only slightly influenced by his friend, Thomas Hobbes.¹ Stubbe pointed out very clearly that religious liberty could never be attained or preserved so long as the functions and roles of the state and church were confused. Men gather under the rule of the magistrate for no other end than the attainment of civil peace, while they voluntarily embrace the communion of a church in order to find spiritual peace.² Both the functions and the ends of the two societies are unrelated. Men determine the form and the decisions of government by argument and majority dominance, whereas spiritual causes have of necessity to be decided by spiritual means. Since the mere fact of power in no sense ensures correctness in spiritual matters, it is not possible for a dominant party to "conferre a power on their magistrate, to . . . promote and uphold they know not what." The very nature of religion is violated and prerogatives which God has retained to Himself are usurped when the state or its deputies rule with imperious arrogance in areas of conscience which God has left free.³

Stubbe professed to believe that any form of government could secure to mankind the benefits of peace and order. This being true, it would appear that men should entrust sovereignty to that constitution which best preserves religious freedom.

¹ Henry Stubbe (or Stubbes, Stubbs), a native of Lincolnshire, was educated at Westminster School. His family, which had been ruined by the war, was assisted by Sir Henry Vane, who sent his protégé to Christ Church, Oxford. Stubbe, after his graduation in 1653, served for two years with the parliamentary army in Scotland. He was appointed to a post in the Bodleian, but was dismissed in 1659 because of his scathing attacks upon organized religion in general and the clergy in particular. (*S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, clxxx, 63.) He seems to have conformed at the time of the Restoration, and in 1661 went to Jamaica as royal physician to that colony. Ill health caused him to return to England after some years. He practised his profession at Stratford-on-Avon, though writing and acrimonious controversy continued to engage most of his time. (Colville, F. L., *The Worthies of Warwickshire, etc.* [Warwick, 1869], 730-731.) Hobbes, who knew him well, seems to have held him in high esteem. A brilliant, courageous, and versatile man, only his irascibility and his quixotic character prevented him from making an important contribution to English thought.

² Stubbe, Henry, *An essay in defence of the good old cause, or a discourse concerning the rise and extent of the power of the civil magistrate in reference to spiritual affairs, etc.* (L., 1659), 27.

³ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

Stubbe followed Harrington in his intense distrust of democratic institutions, pointing out in particular that such a form of government imposed grave risks upon religious toleration. In revolutionary England, he argued, religious liberty has been secured by a determined minority which happened to control the military. Those who oppose religious freedom are at once more numerous and wealthy, and directly they are admitted to a decisive share in government both tolerance and stability will be instantly destroyed. The nation has especially to fear the Anglicans and Presbyterians, who constitute the dominant majority in England and who display a disposition to unite in the hope of "cheating each other into an uniformity, or out of the profits accruing from a destroyed-sectarian-toleration."¹ England, Stubbe declared with the Restoration in mind, must determine its political decisions with strict reference to the end of retaining intact the priceless benefits of a religious freedom won at the cost of such great travail.

Civil peace can never be attained in England nor can spiritual vitality be restored, Stubbe maintained, until the last vestige of the theory of religious coercion has been destroyed. The employment of force vitiates the very essence of the Christian faith. We should reflect, and reflect again, that though "terror may bring men to an outward compliance" it can never alter their judgments. It suffices only to drive men from error into the awful sin of hypocrisy.² Persecution has the immediate consequence of destroying the Church and of gravely weakening the cement of the civil society. Those who would constrain the consciences of other men mistake the nature of true faith and seek with their puny edicts and punishments to order areas of thought and conscience which God has left free. An act of Parliament ordaining "that the blinde should receive sight, that the lame should walke, that the sun should arise at mid-night" would certainly be no more impious or ridiculous than the effort of a civil government to order religion and to control the free scope of faith.³ These are matters which lie within the disposition of God, who may be trusted to work His will in His own way and time.

¹ Stubbe, *Essay in defence of the good old cause*, Pref.

² *Ibid.*, 31-32.

³ *Ibid.*, 35.

Stubbe dealt with the question of heresy in a rough and matter of fact manner which displays perfectly both his own scepticism and the amazing drift of English lay opinion from the moorings of orthodoxy during the revolutionary decade. The term heresy has been loosely and viciously used by men intent upon their own aggrandizement. In point of fact it is normally applied against those who dare exercise their own judgment in religious matters. It is at once irreligious and irrational to accuse of heresy those who have sought truth earnestly but have for any one of a number of reasons failed to attain it.¹ Certainly, Stubbe maintained with an almost startling logic, such persons stand no more condemned than do those who by accident or custom have embraced truth. Those men who would destroy or coerce the heretic impiously add their fallible glosses to the clear mandate of Christ. Those who betray weakness of faith before heresy are enjoined by Christ to avoid those lost in error, but until a further revelation has so informed us they must not destroy them.²

There was deeply rooted in Stubbe's thought an almost anarchistic devotion to absolute spiritual individualism which, we may believe, was derived from a thorough scepticism that was rather implied than developed in his writings. God, he maintained, has given to every human being an absolute liberty to search for truth. "To what purpose," he demanded, "is there so much liberty permitted as may beget our torture, and not permit us to rest where we finde satisfaction? Either prohibit to search at all, or let us be sensible of some benefit by searching; to believe, what appears untrue, seems to me impossible: to professe, what we believe untrue, I am sure, is damnable."³ The ultimate and irreducible authority in questions of faith is the individual reason which the Spirit of God guides in its search for truth.⁴ Even revelation cannot invade reason in an issue which concerns salvation, since what is clearly revelation to one man is evidently spurious to another. If we entrust our faith to the persuasion of every man who says he is sent from heaven we will with reasonable certainty consign our souls to hell. There is, it is true, a "prime verity"

¹ Stubbe, *Essay in defence of the good old cause*, 122.

² *Ibid.*, 125.

³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

in religion, but men apprehend it in so many different ways and express the truth they have discovered so cloudily that religious truth has no more than subjective virtue or meaning. No authority, no common rule, no system of uniformity, therefore, can be imposed which transcends or usurps the personality of the individual.¹ In this logic we find spiritual individualism reduced to its ultimate meaning; it implies, as it requires, an absolute religious liberty.

Stubbe rested his plea for religious toleration upon the argument that no infallible guide in religious matters exists, aside from the conscience of the individual man. This position is so obvious that it should require no proof. But sound precedents in history and the solid persuasion of reason alike lend support to the claims of religious liberty. Thus we should ever bear in mind that "after the settlement of the Church of Christ by his apostles, there is not a word of persecution and suppressing dissenters."² This was true in an age when infallible interpreters of Christ's teachings were still alive. Stubbe maintained that the Church made all of its great advances in the era when its strength and spiritual vigour were not enfeebled by the paralysis of coercion. Persecution came into the Church, he argued, when the late Roman emperors proscribed heresy in order to seize the property of those who were condemned.³ This evil course had no other effect than to secure a uniform profession of religion, while erroneous opinion and heretical sects were driven under ground. The history of Christendom has ever since been disgraced by a constant scourge of persecution which has gravely impaired the spiritual nature of the Church and has allied it rather with the Jewish law than with the Gospel of Christ.⁴

The tight structure of tyranny was first loosened by the Protestant Revolt, Stubbe indicated, though the several Protestant sects have been unable completely to throw off the inherited evil of a coercive tradition. Inflexible religious groups, he wrote, have in several countries perpetuated violent wars which could be ended only by adopting a policy of toleration, which men gradually realized was prescribed both by the

¹ Stubbe, *Essay in defence of the good old cause*, 40.

² *Ibid.*, 49.

³ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 101-113.

requirements of Christianity and by the necessity for restoring civil order. In England the principles of toleration have slowly been hammered out on the anvil of war, but a sound peace and an enduring liberty will never be attained until the bounds of comprehension are so far extended as to embrace the Anglicans and the loyal Roman Catholics within the structure of legal toleration.¹ Men of large vision and infinite charity are required by history for laying the sure foundations of a new England which will unite men as they are citizens by granting to them an unconditioned liberty in those areas of conscience and thought into which no human power may intrude.

Stubbe spoke for many men in England when he sketched with such skilful strokes the design of the future. He was fully prepared to extend complete liberty of faith and worship to all religious groups so long as they did not by seditious action violate the structure of civil sovereignty. By careful argument Stubbe vindicated the position, so important in the philosophical defence of religious toleration, that no spiritual authority can be sustained which impinges upon the individual conscience. This teaching in effect destroys the institutional nature of religion and in consequence makes religion a matter of indifference to the state. Furthermore, Stubbe took it as axiomatic that the sheer gravity of historical development had made toleration inevitable in the modern world. The discussion with him was concerned not so much with a defence of a theory, which he evidently took for granted, as with the consideration of ways and means by which it might be translated into political reality. Stubbe and, we may believe, the lay mind of England had by the time of the Restoration accepted those principles which undergird the legal toleration upon which the political institutions of the modern world were to be erected.

4. THE ECONOMIC INTEREST

Numerous modern scholars gripped by the spell of economic determinism have urged that the persuasion of economic interest was one of the most important of the causes underlying the development of religious toleration. This argument is con-

¹ Stubbe, *Essay in defence of the good old cause*, 133-139.

vincing; it is certainly facile; and it probably rests upon historically correct judgments concerning the nature of the mature capitalistic mind. But like so many of the assumptions of historical determinists of various schools it rests essentially upon a pure theory concerning those motivations and articulate self-interests which ideally should have been present in the early seventeenth-century mind. It assumes, further, a maturity and a class consciousness which were not clearly exhibited by the merchant group in England, prior to 1660 at least. And, finally, this view rests upon the notion that the commercial group was in this formative period of capitalism primarily influenced by economic interests in its political and religious thought. We are too likely in the present century to forget that men in the revolutionary era were powerfully moved by abstract principles and by ideals which not infrequently were pursued with a stubborn and heroic devotion that could be quite careless of the economic consequences of political action.

The fact is that the economic argument for religious toleration, evident and powerful though it may seem to a later generation, was very rarely advanced before 1660. We have previously observed that it was urged most frequently by the early Baptist thinkers, who, it seems evident, had been influenced by their intimate contacts with Dutch thought and by the success of the tolerant experiments in Holland.¹ The great Baptist apologist, Henry Busher, had as early as 1614 pointed out the social and economic benefits that are derived from toleration.² Several of the minor Baptist theorists during the period of the Civil Wars refer casually to the prosperity which toleration will ensure, while Roger Williams bent the economic argument to his larger thesis in a few detached but brilliant paragraphs.³ We have dealt fully with the more systematic and powerful analysis which Henry Robinson and Henry Parker lent to the exposition of the economic advantages that accrue to the nation that adopts religious liberty as part of its constitution.⁴ We shall treat here a few additional suggestions which indicate an economic argument for, if not an economic interest

¹ Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 461-462.

² *Ibid.*, II, 295-296.

³ *Ibid.*, III, 503.

⁴ *Vide ante*, 140-176 (and esp. 143, 158-159), 269-276 (and esp. 275-276).

in, the attainment of religious freedom. This represents approximately the sum of the economic discussion of this problem during the critical years prior to the Restoration.

The modern writers who point out the strength of the economic consideration in the development of tolerant theory and practice prior to 1660 have tended to prove their case with evidence which, curiously enough, dates from the later decades of the century. It must be remembered that the theory of toleration stood substantially complete and the lay mind was generally persuaded of both the inevitability and the desirability of a tolerant solution for the problem of dissent some decades before economic thought had matured and certainly long before the merchant class demanded religious liberty in the interests of trade rather than in the interests of their own consciences. It is clear, indeed, that when the economic argument is propounded during the years under survey it is normally posed rather tentatively as an after-thought of uncertain value. Even in a great economic thinker like Robinson the foundations of his mature defence of religious freedom were constructed of materials quite unrelated to economics. Typically the economic argument appears in systematic *apologias* for toleration in which every remote reason is marshalled in the defence of religious liberty; and it was but rarely in those cases that the economic interests of the nation or of any class were carefully urged. Religious toleration was to be vindicated by a slow fusion of quite complex political, religious, and social causes in which the economic interest figured very remotely indeed.

We have sought to demonstrate that the religious preoccupation which had gripped England and Western Europe for a full century was rapidly withering in the middle of the seventeenth century before the heat of sectarian bigotry and of a Civil War energized by religious fanaticism. But the religious preoccupation was not to be supplanted immediately by the economic. A great revolution was in progress throughout the western world during the seventeenth century in which the institutional, ethical, and moral habits of mankind were to be profoundly altered. We have indicated that the fires of faith in England were damped by the wet and chilly fogs of indifference

which by the conclusion of the revolutionary era were settling over the thought of the nation. When men despaired of the further pursuit of the religious ideal of an organic Christian society they turned insensibly towards the creation of a society in this world which would measure its nobility and justify its existence in the more pragmatic terms of prosperity, more abundant goods,—and larger profits. An ascetic ideal was abandoned and the harsh doctrine that ideals cannot prevail against the motive of gain came to tincture economic and political thought in the late seventeenth century.¹ Toleration came in these later years to be an axiomatic argument of the mercantilists, not so much because of its positive benefits as because it had become the symbol of opposition to the priestly caste and the tangible evidence of a profoundly significant reaction to an age of faith that was past. Both Protestantism and Catholicism had been so completely absorbed during this era of transition in defending infallible pretensions and in maintaining intact the battle lines of an irreconcilable struggle that the Church was not only all but to destroy itself, but was gravely to impair its capacity for leadership in the formulation of a new ethic and in the building of a new society. Both the economic and the political theorists of the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century found in the theory of toleration a cloak in which they might respectably wrap their indifference or effectively conceal their actual hostility to institutional religion. As Mr. Tawney has so brilliantly suggested, toleration arranged a truce between the religious and the indifferent man—they no longer came into collision because they could never meet.²

This was to be the broad outline of development during the century following the restoration of the monarchy in England. Full and competent use was made by the economic writers of this later period of a theory of toleration already fully fashioned, but we must repeat that they neither formulated nor matured that theory. The body of strictly economic thought bearing precisely on the question of toleration is very small indeed during the revolutionary era.

¹ Heckscher, E. F., *Mercantilism* (L., 1935), II, 301.

² Tawney, R. H., *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (L., 1926), 280.

Sir Thomas Roe, speaking in Parliament in 1641, argued that the decline of the clothing trade in England could not be halted until the "pressure upon tender consciences," which had caused many competent workmen to seek security in exile, had been relaxed. Furthermore, workmen from foreign countries should be encouraged to emigrate to England under adequate guarantees of freedom of worship. He strongly urged that the religious divisions and the chronic intolerance of the various sectarian groups exercised a restraining influence upon all trade and pleaded that some religious settlement which would restore confidence be embraced as soon as possible.¹ Cromwell continued the Elizabethan policy of granting refuge to foreign Protestants not only to stimulate trade and to increase the population of the nation,² but as an humanitarian action designed to relieve the pains of persecution abroad.³

The agricultural writer, Gabriel Plattes, was apparently primarily influenced by economic considerations in his advocacy of toleration. In his *Practicall Husbandry Improved* (1656) he vigorously condemned the wars of religion and all species of sectarian fanaticism on the interesting grounds that these struggles had prevented any advance in husbandry and had drained off labour to destructive ends. Plattes vigorously denounced as lustful and ignorant those men who would implement religious convictions by persecution and warfare. Such men forget that religion ever reflects the temperament and traditions of particular peoples, and by their imperious courses they destroy the fundamental verity of religion by an arrogant insistence upon selfish preoccupations.⁴ The strain and friction which have characterized the political and religious history of the modern age, Plattes evidently believed, reflect the uncer-

¹ Roe, Sir Thomas, *Sir Thomas Roe's speech in Parliament. Wherein he sheweth the cause of the decay of coin and trade in this land, especially of merchants trade, etc.* (L., 1641), in *Harleian Miscellany*, IV, 436.

² Ashley, M. P., *Oliver Cromwell. The Conservative Dictator* (L., 1937), 270-271.

³ Shaw, W. A., *Letters of Denization and Acts of Naturalization for Aliens in England and Ireland, etc.* (Publications of the Huguenot Society, XVIII) (Lyminster, 1911), 66-74. About 250 foreigners were granted letters of denization between 1655 and 1658.

⁴ Plattes, Gabriel, *A discovery of infinite treasure, hidden since the worlds beginning, etc.* (L., 1639), Pref.

tainty and misery that flow from an economy of scarcity. The religious ills will be cured, he optimistically predicted, once productivity has been enlarged and directly all men have been secured in their basic wants. He submitted his view that the world had been torn to pieces by the pursuit of abstract and destructive objectives which have gravely interfered with the sober business of living. Plattes was almost fanatically devoted to the betterment of the standard of living in England and looked with dour suspicion upon the religious preoccupation as the principal impediment to the attainment of a happier national life which must be based upon more abundant and more widely distributed resources.¹ Similar utilitarian views are evident in the agricultural writings of men like Hartlib, Blith, and Moore, who do not, however, avail themselves of the economic argument for religious toleration.

In an interesting Utopian pamphlet published in 1659, *A Way Propounded to Make the Poor in These and Other Nations Happy*, the force of the economic argument is likewise applied to the consideration of the problem of toleration.² The writer sought to persuade his generation that the moral energy expended on pointless religious wars and destructive sectarian feuds should be dedicated to the attainment of a richer social and economic life. To this end children should receive no rigid or definite religious training calculated to preserve and inculcate the dangerous fanaticisms which have wrought so much harm in the world. Rather they should be afforded a carefully balanced education in the arts, in languages, and in the natural sciences which will fit them properly for life and which will enable them to make a rational choice in religion when they have attained maturity.³ The state will inevitably be composed of men and women of many religious views, but this fact need

¹ Plattes, *Practicall husbandry*, Pref., 88-89, 91-92. This interesting and somewhat neglected work makes a contribution of considerable importance to both political and economic theory.

² This stimulating pamphlet, signed Peter Cornelius, was probably from the pen of Hugh Peters. The attribution is suggested by close similarity of style and by the soaring and constructive imagination so typical of Peters. For a more extensive discussion of Peters's thought *vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 412-421.

³ Cornelius, Peter (i.e., Peters, Hugh), *A way propounded to make the poor in these and other nations happy, etc.* (L., 1659), 15-16.

disturb neither its security nor its prosperity. The modern state, the writer implied, must base itself upon the general interests of its citizens and must find new and deeper foundations by a watchful care over the social and economic well-being of those persons who comprise it. Religious freedom is necessary for the modern society, particularly since it ensures that "noe loss will be suffered by the changing of our opinions" and since it deliberately separates private opinions from personal advantage.¹ Above all else the state must define good citizenship in purely secular terms which impose no unenforceable demands in areas of conscience and sentiment into which the civil authority intrudes at its own peril.

In these pamphlets, when considered in relation to the maturer writings of Robinson and Parker, we discover the first dim outlines of the political and economic thought of an age to come. But neither these writers nor the bent of their thought was to contribute much to the conception of the theory of toleration in the seventeenth century. The historian must assess with due caution those ripples upon the surface of thought which are shortly to sweep as a groundswell across the shores of history, cutting new patterns of thought and habit in the configurations of the past; he must not, in fine, write the history of the past in terms of the present.

5. THE THOUGHT OF THE RANK AND FILE

a. On the role of the magistrate in the Church

The inarticulate laity were unanimous in their denial to the civil ruler of coercive power in religious causes. Furthermore, they grasped by rather dim implication the principles of dissociation of church and state which Roger Williams formulated with such clarity in the early days of the Civil War. The magistracy, it was generally admitted, could erect a form of public worship, but the Christian conscience must be protected by express provision of law against every threat of compulsion. It must be understood as a principle of politics and a truth of religion that spiritual questions "and the wayes of Gods

¹ [Peters], *A way propounded to make the poor . . . happy*, 16.

worship, are not at all intrusted by us to any human power."¹ The authority over men's bodies belongs to the civil magistrate, but Christ has specifically reserved every vestige of spiritual jurisdiction to Himself.² Since the religious conscience has been left absolutely free and sovereign, any restraint that is brought to bear upon it is at once impious and tyrannous.

These radical thinkers, many of whom had received their training in political theory in the New Model, were strong in their conviction that the ultimate purpose of the Civil War had been to secure the separation of church and state. England stands fully persuaded that religion can be neither propagated nor controlled by the civil ruler. He should in the interests of complete freedom protect every Christian in the unmolested exercise of his faith, but neither capacity nor knowledge permits the sovereign to order faith.³ The doctrine of persecution which has so long troubled both church and state has been insinuated into political thinking by the devil himself, Lilburne maintained. There can be no denial of the fact that for centuries the magistrate has interfered in religion, but he has done so without scriptural warrant. In England, particularly since the time of Henry VIII, the ruler has been sinfully sitting on the throne of Christ Himself.⁴ Christ alone is Lord of the human conscience, and any intrusion into the sacred freedom of the human spirit may rightfully be resisted with every arm which men may grasp in their own defence. The civil ruler fulfils his true and complete function when he establishes and maintains the firm civil peace essential to the fruition of faith in the life of the nation. If he will but exercise impartial justice and protect all men in their God-given liberty of worship, the ruler will gain the confidence and support of all religious men.⁵

¹ *A declaration from the severall respective regiments in the army, etc.* (L., 1647), no pagin.

² *Severall votes of tender conscience* (L., 1646), s.sh.

³ White, Francis, *The copies of severall letters contrary to the opinion of the present powers, presented to the Lord Gen. Fairfax, and Lieut. Gen. Cromwell* (L., 1649), 11.

⁴ Lilburne, John, *A copie of a letter written by John Lilburne . . . to Mr. William Prinne, etc.* (L., 1645), 4-5. For a fuller discussion of Lilburne's thought and career, *vide Jordan, Religious Toleration*, III, 95, 120, 128-130.

⁵ White, *Copies of severall letters*, 11-13.

b. Anti-clericalism

We have noticed that a deep-seated anti-clericalism pervaded the thought of every lay group in England during the era of the Civil War. In no other segment of society was this bitterness, born of disillusionment and dislike of rigorous religious policy, so frank and extreme as amongst the inconspicuous men and women who were for the first time in English history decisively influencing thought. Mrs. Hutchinson, in commenting on the religious situation at the eve of the Civil War, shrewdly remarked that the clergy had sacrificed their role as spiritual leaders by dividing England into irreconcilable factions.¹ The over-zealous repression undertaken by the Laudian regime aroused a violent distrust of the Anglican clergy which was almost immediately extended to a hatred of the clergy in general. Thus John White, a member for London, complained in the Commons' debates in 1642 that "the greatest and chiefest authors of our miseries is the bishops and their adherents, favourers of the Romish and Arminian faction; that have with a high hand stretched out arm in their several places of power and jurisdiction . . . exercised cruelty and tyranny over the children and saints of God, binding the consciences of free subjects only to their opinions and commands in the exercise of their religion."² Lilburne alleged even more hysterically that the Anglican clergy was antichristian and idolatrous.³ These men, he charged, have bent the precious truths of Christ to their own ends in order to secure the perpetuity of a sadistic cruelty. They have built the structure of their faith and the fabric of their church upon no sounder basis than the sheer terror which their persecuting courses have inspired in timorous men.⁴ They destroy all opposition and blight every enquiring mind, since "they have no other argu-

¹ Hutchinson, Lucy, *Memoirs of the life of Colonel Hutchinson, etc.* (ed. by Julius Hutchinson, revised by C. H. Firth) (L., 1885), I, 99-103.

² White, John, *Speech to the House of Commons, etc.* (January 17, 1642), in Nalson, John, *An impartial collection of the great affairs of state, etc.* (L., 1682-1683), II, 886 (mispaged).

³ Lilburne, John, *Come out of her my people, etc.* (L., 1639), 8-18.

⁴ White, *Speech to the . . . Commons*, in Nalson, *An impartial collection*, II, 886.

ments to maintain their tottering and languishing kingdome, but clubb law, that is to say, tyranny, blood thirstiness and cruelty.”¹

The anti-clerical sentiment so pronounced in the vigorous attack upon the Anglican clergy was intensified and broadened into an indictment of the clergy in general when it became apparent that the Presbyterians proposed to erect a new and even more rigid system of uniformity upon the ruins of prelacy. The libels upon the Presbyterians display at once a kind of hysteria and a most significant disillusionment which was the initial stage of the indifference and sheer scepticism so pronounced a decade later. England reflected gloomily that it had gained less than nothing by an exchange of spiritual masters. The persecutions and intolerance of the bishops have been replaced by another “no more infallible then the former, to the extreme discouragement and affliction of many thousands . . . who are not satisfied that controversies in religion can be trusted to the compulsive regulation of any,” and who hoped after the destruction of prelatical tyranny “never to have seen such a power assumed by any in this nation any more.”² A new monster of clerical bigotry has been spawned which seeks by presbyters to reduce all faith to a common mould. These men would destroy a kingdom in pursuit of a selfish and imperious end and they conspire to “disenfranchise all honest and tender conscience men, that cannot take that impossible to be kept and double faced Covenant, the greatest make-bate and snare that ever the divell, and the clergy his agents, cast in amongst honest men in England.”³

The people of England, and the army which they have dedicated to the cause of Christian liberty, have been betrayed by the clerical interest which, whether Anglican or Presbyterian, ever seeks the enslavement of the human conscience. The clergy have set themselves up as “little gods . . . somewhat more

¹ Lilburne, *Come out of her my people*, 25.

² *To the right honourable and supreme authority of this nation, the Commons in Parliament assembled. The humble petition of many thousands, earnestly desiring the glory of God, the freedome of the Common-wealth, and the peace of all men* (L., 1647), 2-3.

³ Lilburne, John, *Londons liberty in chains discovered. And published, etc.* (L., 1646), 42.

then men" in order to secure the continued paralysis of faith.¹ These orthodox spirits, far more interested in the propriety of creed than in the veracity of faith, conspire to force still another "traditionall formall profession" upon England.² They seek by a "violent persecution, upon the account of conscience" to fasten a new slavery upon the nation in the name of discipline.³ The clergy has, in fine, strayed so far from Christ as to forget that "religion is not a name, but a thing; not a forme, but a power, not a notion, but a substance divine."⁴

The terrible and chronic intolerance of the clerical mind, it was suggested, flows basically from the fears of fallible and selfish men who find their interests called into question. If the Presbyterian system were as clearly ordained by God as the orthodox pretend, the clergy would not grasp the instruments of coercion with such celerity.⁵ They are men of little faith who cannot face without the magistrate's assistance those who teach the truth of Christ. They err so dangerously as to suggest that a nation can be made god-like by law and that God Himself requires the protection of the civil sword. They prate of heresy when they actually fear the free light of truth. What really afflicts them is the sheer terror inspired by their own weakness of faith. For directly England has gained complete freedom of speech, liberty of the press, and an unconditional toleration, the glory and power of the clerical caste will quickly be destroyed. And why, one vigorous and indignant writer enquired, "should those clergie men, who are in no more relation to God then other men . . . assume unto themselves a power of judging and censuring of opinions, doctrines and practices in matters of religion"?⁶ The clerical intolerance of the Presbyterians is quite as dangerous and injurious as the Anglican rigours from which England has suffered so grievously in the past. Wherever

¹ *Certaine scruples from the army: presented in a dialogue betweene a minister of the new moulded presbytery, and a souldier of his Excellencies . . . army, etc.* (L., 1647), 2.

² White, *Copies of severall letters*, 10.

³ Hutchinson, *Memoirs of . . . Colonel Hutchinson*, II, 95-96.

⁴ White, *Copies of severall letters*, 10.

⁵ *Dictated thoughts upon the Presbyterians late petitions for compleat and universall power, etc.* (L., 1646), s.sh.

⁶ *Strong motives, or loving and modest advice, unto the petitioners for Presbyterian government, etc.* (L., 1645), 4.

clerical leadership has gained a foothold religious freedom and vitality have speedily been destroyed. "So absolute and uncontrollable is this high celestial court, that it commandeth conscience and soul, disposeth of body and estate in the point of religion, that if you conform not in all, neither soul nor body, nor estate can be in peace; nay, no toleration can be allow'd when this sovereignty domineereth."¹ They define truth in terms of penalties and crucify the earnest and honest conscience upon the cross of a bestial intolerance.

The evidence of a dark hostility to clerical leadership and orthodox pretensions amongst the rank and file might be very considerably enlarged. Though it differs somewhat in quality from that which pervades the thought of the more powerful and articulate rationalists, it flows from the same deep and chilly wells of fear and disillusionment. In the dim recesses of public opinion, as deeply as the evidence goes, we discover a strongly-seated disposition to disown clerical leadership and an earnest searching after a firmer basis of peace and freedom. These obscure men thought and wrote within the broad and ill-defined limits of what is most accurately described as a lay Christianity. The England that fought the Civil War was persuaded, incorrectly perhaps, that that war had been waged in the interests of a larger freedom which men were haltingly and almost instinctively seeking to define in terms that spelled the end of an exclusive system of religious truth and worship. That reaction which is the Restoration cannot obscure the fact that England had by the close of the Cromwellian era moved very close indeed to the modern conception of religious toleration.

c. *On persecution*

The lay group in England was strongly united in an intense opposition to every form of persecution, and it is particularly significant, in estimating the changes which the agitations and discussions of the Civil War period wrought in English thought,

¹ *The burden of Issachar: or, the tyrannicall power and practices of the Presbyteriall-government in Scotland, etc.* ([L.], 1646), in *Phoenix, etc.* (L., 1707-1708), II, 299.

to observe that the term persecution had been enlarged by common consent to include that degree of discipline necessary for the attainment and maintenance of any national religious establishment. The rank and file at least had been persuaded that the Civil War had been fought to protect the nation against a revival of any form of ecclesiastical organization which secured its position and maintained its discipline by rigorous courses. It will be observed that the heavy incidence of publication of the pamphlets which express so vigorously the views of the inarticulate occurs in the critical years between 1647 and early 1649, when there was grave cause to fear that a rigidly orthodox Presbyterian Establishment might be imposed upon the nation.¹ A vast wave of protest arose, of which this literature is a rather insignificant part, that swept the Presbyterians from power and secured to the tolerant and sagacious Cromwell a broad and stable basis of sovereignty.

The Presbyterians, it was hotly alleged, have endeavoured by every possible means to effect a forcible reformation in England.² They seek to place themselves in the still warm seats of the prelates. The orthodox clergy have shown every mark of the persecutors and have endeavoured by their arrogant policy to violate both the reason and the conscience of the nation.³ They have sought a solution to the religious controversies which divide England by the specious method of making political dominance the ultimate test of religious truth. Surely all sane and Christian men realize that such a policy results in the ruin of religion and the destruction of the civil society. For if the Presbyterians have a divine mission to extirpate those who oppose them, then every other sect has no alternative but to grasp the sword to the consequent destruction of society.⁴ It was not to this terrible end that the Civil War was fought. The three kingdoms should be brought to a comprehensive and Protestant public exercise of faith by every spiritual agency which can be mustered to that purpose, but "no human force

¹ Of the 41 pamphlets cited in this section, 25 were published in these three years; another nine in the year 1659, when means for securing religious liberty against the inevitable return of the monarchy were being frantically explored.

² *Certaine scruples from the army*, 17.

³ *Dictated thoughts*, s.sh.

⁴ *Certaine scruples from the army*, 20.

or power" may be exerted in that cause. England must be guided in the reformation which she seeks to effect by the persuasion that "the weapons of the christian warfare are spirituall, not carnall, but mighty in operation to the destroying of the thoughts and imaginations of mens hearts into subjection, according to the mind and will of God."¹ By strict devotion to this Christian principle alone will England attain the spiritual regeneration and the civil peace to which she has dedicated her armies.

England will have learned very little indeed from the harsh experience of civil war if she proposes to found a new Church that rests upon the pillars of persecution and banishment.² The tender conscience of a Christian nation demands that these impious and imperious courses be abandoned in the propagation of faith.³ The will of a tolerant nation and the arms of a resolved military have alone protected England from the persecutions which the Presbyterians have so skilfully designed. These over-zealous spirits have cried out, with contemptuous regard for the Word of God, for the prevention and cure of error by temporal punishments. It is evident that they seek to bind both truth and error within the coils of their persecuting system. "Their armes must be long and strong," indeed, one writer observed, "lest they in controuling of others, are controuled themselves, and their own weapons fly in their own faces."⁴ For these men propose nothing else than a new persecution designed to supplant an ancient tyranny. They have forced a religious issue into the sphere of politics; they have taken up weapons with which they will themselves be destroyed.⁵

The Presbyterians, the lay writers contended, had raised up the spectre of persecution by exploiting the ignorant fears and the superstitious dread which simple people have been taught to entertain of error. They have clothed their lust for power in an arrogant assumption that they can determine infallibly

¹ White, *Copies of severall letters*, 13.

² *Certaine scruples from the army*, 21.

³ *A petition presented by the inhabitants of Newport-Pagnell and the parts adjacent to . . . Generall Fairfax, and the generall councill at White-Hall, etc.* (L., 1648), s.sh.; *Severall votes of tender conscience*, s.sh.

⁴ *Dictated thoughts*, s.sh.

⁵ *Certaine scruples from the army*, 22.

between truth and error. They have, in fact, framed a persecuting discipline even before they have a church to govern. They have entrenched themselves in a rigid and infallible position at an awful risk, since the religion of England is in a state of flux and the direction of its movement is quite uncertain.¹ They have defined heresy quite simply and neatly as disagreement with their own peculiar conception of religious truth. This inflexible and tyrannous definition of faith they propose to impose upon a nation not yet recovered from an earlier persecution. The means for the execution of their design are the sword of the magistrate and a feverish and uncharitable assault upon sober consciences guilty of nothing more than disagreement.² Surely the irrefutable counsel of history, if not the persuasion of Christianity itself, will give them pause. They should know that "we have spiritual weapons given us for spiritual combats, and those who go about to conquer subjects for Christ with swords of steel, shall find the base metal break to shivers when it is used, and hurtfully fly in their own faces."³

These persecuting spirits, another writer submitted, had learned nothing of charity, nothing of the infinite dangers to which coercive practices expose both church and state. These orthodox men have sat like vultures over a land torn by civil war. Nor do they recall their strong devotion to the principle of liberty of conscience during the period when they were under the cross. "How is it then," an anonymous writer demanded, "that you so earnestly endeavour for such a government as pretendeth to have a right of controlling and directing all men in matters of Gods worship?"⁴ The Presbyterians claim to have determined the true limits of Christian truth, but it is a pretence founded upon blind zeal rather than upon reasonable proof. No pious metaphysics, no protestations of charity, and no feverish concern with the errors of England can disguise the fact that they propose to subject a nation just emerging into the light of religious liberty to another and still more terrible scourge of persecution. This is the viper loose in the land which the heel of the army must destroy.

¹ *Strong motives*, 3.

² *Certaine scruples from the army*, II.

³ Hutchinson, *Memoirs of . . . Colonel Hutchinson*, I, 101-102.

⁴ *Strong motives*, 2.

d. The demand for toleration

The most common vehicle for the expression of inarticulate opinion was the petition, often signed by hundreds of subscribers, addressed to Parliament, to the army, or to Cromwell. These petitions were normally roughly drawn and apparently were submitted only after wide circulation through the countryside. There is ample evidence that Parliament and later the Lord Protector took them seriously as symptomatic of public opinion and there is certainly reason to believe that they were not unimportant in the moulding of public opinion. The petitioners expressed themselves vigorously and without reservation on the question of religious liberty. The phrasing of the remarks on toleration tend to follow the general formula set by the *Agreement of the People*, and there is strong evidence that the principles enunciated in that remarkable document were by constant reiteration burned deep into the English consciousness.¹ It should likewise be observed that the petitions regarding religious toleration betray in their temper and phrasing the important fact that large masses of opinion had been convinced that the Civil War had been fought primarily in order to secure the benefits of religious liberty for the nation. The petitioners do not so much request as demand a larger spiritual freedom from the various revolutionary governments. A most significant transformation in the religious thinking of the nation at large had occurred, and we may say with some assurance that the theory of religious toleration was rapidly attaining maturity in English thought.

The rank and file were extremely sensitive to any surviving restrictions upon freedom of conscience and liberty of worship. There are many complaints that though the spiritual courts had been destroyed the civil courts were on occasion employed to restrict the liberty of "persons of most tender conscience."²

¹ Vide Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 120 ff., for an extensive discussion of the evolution and influence of this important document. Though itself an expression and crystallization of the thought of the rank and file, the document was of such political and historical importance that it seemed desirable to treat it in connection with the development of governmental policy.

² *To his highness Oliver Lord Protector of the Common-wealth of England . . . the humble petition of the free holders and other well affected people of this common wealth, etc.* ([L.], n.d.), s.sh.

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Religious liberty stands in danger so long as any persons are imprisoned for conscience, "unlesse such persons shall be proved either popish recusants (and that by some other way then by their not coming to church) or to have in . . . private meetings . . . some perjurious designe, conspiracie and practice against the state."¹ Nor can the foundations of religious toleration be regarded as secure until all statutes designed to enforce either uniformity of faith or uniformity of worship be repealed.² England must guard her heritage of liberty jealously and must insist with common voice "that all incursions of arbitrary power or ecclesiastical censures, that in any new shape, or by-waies may possibly creep into practice, to persecute the consciences, infringe the liberties, or incumber the outward estates of the people" be speedily destroyed.³

The general view was strongly argued that no enduring civil government could be established in England which was not founded on the principle of religious liberty. Men may well enquire "what freedom is there to conscientious people when the magistrate shall be intrusted with a restrictive power in matters of religion."⁴ No man should be entrusted with the sacred responsibility of civil government who bears in his personality the taint of a persecuting disposition.⁵ The state may if it chooses establish a National Church along comprehensive lines so long as it leaves the individual conscience absolutely free "to the law and will" of God.⁶ The state of the future in England must be founded squarely and securely upon the principle of a complete religious toleration. When this has been accomplished the basis of a noble and enduring peace will have been laid and the state may at last devote itself with singleness of purpose to the pressing secular needs of its citizens. The true ends of government will thereby be attained

¹ *A further proposal from . . . Sir Thomas Fairfax, and the councill of warre. . . . Desiring the discharge of all such persons as are imprisoned under pretence of conventicles, etc.* (L., 1647), 2.

² Everard, Robert, *et al.*, *The case of the army truly stated* (L., 1647), 18-19.

³ *To . . . Oliver Lord Protector . . . the humble petition of the free holders, s.sh.*

⁴ Lilburne, John, *A plea for common-right and freedom, etc.* (L., 1648), 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ Lilburne, *A copie of a letter . . . to Mr. William Prinne*, 7.

and the striving, discussion, and discord which have resulted from the violation of conscience will disappear from the fabric of political life.¹

It is the function of government, therefore, to erect within the framework of law a public toleration which will restrain all those who "violently break the bounds of civility, and morality, by oppressing tender conscience compulsively, against the very light and law of nature and right reason."² Such a policy will at last secure the triumph of true Christianity and will free the vast resources of spiritual strength which liberty alone evokes. The light of truth shines according to God's will; it is an "inheritance which cannot be purchased by the temporall sword, all the carnall weapons in the world will not procure it." Toleration ensures the free preaching of the Word and it carefully provides that men may be won to the profession of Christ only by the persuasion of sound doctrine and the example of pious lives.³ In the pursuit of this righteous end Parliament must carefully eschew the temptations which tradition and the remonstrations of the orthodox impose upon it to raise some few restrictions around religion. God's truth must be left completely free. The toleration which guards it must be absolute—devoid of those evasions which have "bin generally invented to divide the people amongst themselves, and to affright men from that liberty of discourse by which corruption and tyranny would be soon discovered."⁴ Moreover, the conscience of the nation demands that the principle of toleration shall be so firmly engrafted into the fundamental law

¹ *Strong motives*, 7. The author of this effective tract concludes with the full text of Cromwell's dispatch from Bristol (1645) in which the General strongly championed the principles of toleration. It will be recalled that Parliament printed the dispatch after striking out the offending paragraph (Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 66-67). The author of *Strong motives* commented on this omission in the official text, suggesting that a wrong had been done "either by the printer or some others."

² *Dictated thoughts*, s.sh.

³ *A further proposal from . . . Sir Thomas Fairfax*, 1-2.

⁴ *To the right honorable, the Commons of England. . . . The humble petition of divers wel affected persons inhabiting the city of London, Westminster, the borough of Southwark, Hamblets, and places adjacent, etc.* (L., 1648), 6-7; *To the right honourable the Commons of England, in Parliament assembled. The humble petition of thousands wel-affected persons inhabiting the city of London . . . and places adjacent* (L., 1648), s.sh.

of England that any future attempt to invalidate it shall by definition be null and void.¹

In the critical years in England, when the decision was poised between the ruinous ecclesiastical settlement which the Presbyterians demanded and a tolerant administration of religion offering greater limits of freedom to the human conscience than the nation had ever known, scores of petitions were raised in all parts of the land submitting the solemnly voiced demands of obscure men and women who had gained the vision of religious freedom. These men insisted that toleration must be the fruit of the sacrifices made in the Civil War. The religious demands set forth in these petitions were succinct, simple, and uniformly tolerant. They required a structure of law and government which would guarantee to every peaceful sect the right to worship freely under the protection of the state;² they demanded that the dignity and integrity of every human conscience should be recognized as a principle of politics and a requirement of religion.³ The Petition to Parlia-

¹ C., J., *Magna Charta: containing that which is very much the sence and agreement of the good people of these nations, notwithstanding their differences relating to worship, etc.* (L., 1659), s.sh.; *A letter from the general meeting of officers of the army, and directed to the officers of the several garisons and regiments of souldiers both in Ireland, Scotland, and England* (L., 1653), s.sh.

² *An appeal to heaven: or, a prayer to God for succour and relief, in these times of bloody persecution, etc.* (L., 1649), 1; *To the . . . Commons . . . the humble petition of divers well-affected of the county of Leicester, etc.* (L., 1649), s.sh.; *An humble petition of thousands of wel affected, dwelling in and about London* (1648), in *A Perfect Diurnall of some passages in Parliament*, §268; *A petition from . . . Lord Fairfax and the general council of officers of the army, to the . . . Commons . . . concerning the draught of an Agreement of the People, etc.* (L., 1649), 24-25. Likewise relevant are a number of petitions closely associated with the development of the final form of the *Agreement of the People*, esp. *An Agreement of the People for a firme and present peace, upon grounds of common-right and freedome, etc.* (L., 1647) and *An Agreement of the People of England, and the places therewith incorporated, for a secure and present peace, upon grounds of common right, freedom and safety* (L., 1649).

³ *The onely right rule for regulating the lawes and liberties of the people of England. Presented . . . to . . . the L. Generall Cromwell, and the rest of the officers of the army. . . . By divers affectionate persons, etc.* (L., 1653); *To the . . . Commons. . . . The humble petition of many thousands, earnestly desiring the glory of God, the freedome of the Common-wealth, and the peace of all men* (L., 1647), 5; *To the . . . Parliament. . . . The humble petition of divers constant adherers to this Parliament, etc.* (L., 1652), s.sh.; *To the . . . Commons. . . . The humble petition of divers wel-affected in the hundred of*

ment from Bristol, which was signed by almost four thousand citizens,¹ is typical of the boldness and the remarkably complete tolerance exhibited by the innumerable petitions which poured in on a hesitating army and an uncertain Parliament. The petitioners requested as of right that the Parliament should be "tender in imposing" any religious system upon the conscience of the nation, and required that the government should provide for the "succouring of tender consciences, and not suffer them to be grieved, and brought unto bondage by any rigid impositions, but [should] protect them by the laws, in their civil rights, so long as they live peaceably, and without offence."²

It was from these crude and raw materials of a wide-spread lay conviction that the *Agreement of the People*, one of the most important documents in the history of English thought, was distilled as the expression of the yearning of a people for a stable and tolerant national life.³ These petitions, when considered as a whole, disclose the sources of strength which Cromwell was to exploit in the formation of his policy of administrative tolerance. They betray, indeed, a larger and deeper tolerance than do the more systematic and considered treatises of the intellectual and spiritual leaders of the age—men more fully conscious of the revolutionary implications of absolute toleration than were the inarticulate masses. These

Totmanslaw . . . in the county of Stafford (1649), in *Perfect Diurnall*, §301. When the Restoration appeared to be at hand in 1659 another wave of petitions poured in modelled closely after the forms evolved in the earlier crisis. *Vide* especially *To the . . . Parliament . . . the hearty congratulations and humble petition of thousands of well-affected . . . of . . . Kent, and . . . Canterbury, etc.* (L., 1659), s.sh.; *To the Parliament . . . the humble representation and desires of divers freeholders . . . within the county of Bedford* (L., 1659), s.sh.; *To the . . . Parliament . . . the humble petition of divers free-holders . . . in the county of Hartford* (L., 1659), s.sh.; *To the . . . Parliament . . . the humble petition of divers well-affected inhabitants of the county of Wilts* (L., 1659), s.sh.; *To the Parliament . . . humble petition of divers young men inhabiting in and about the borough of Southwark* (1659), in *Mercurius Politicus*, §569; *A word of seasonable and sound counsell, laid down in severall proposals, etc.* (L., 1659), s.sh.; Nedham, *Marchamont, Interest will not lie. Or, a view of England's true interest, etc.* (L., 1659), 12, 17, 22-23.

¹ *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, September 2, 1647.

² *Petition* [to the House of Commons] *of the inhabitants of the City of Bristol* (1647), in Rushworth, John, *Historical Collections, etc.* (L., 1659-1701), VII, 798-799; *et cf.* *Perfect Diurnall*, September 1, 1647.

³ *Vide ante*, 355.

petitions, obscure in their origin, indicate that the lesson of Presbyterian intolerance, following as it did the Episcopal, had bitten deep into the structure of English thought. There is exhibited a distrust of clerical leadership, a vigorous disavowal of the organic theory of the Church, and an almost violent denunciation of all pretensions to exclusive truth, which indicate very clearly that the fires of fanaticism had burned themselves out in England. These petitions impose very few limitations upon universal toleration and suggest that Cromwell would have found a much larger support than he dared believe had he sought to extend full toleration both to the Anglicans and to the Romanists as a principle of religious right. We discover in these documents a lay Christianity which had disowned clerical leadership and which was remarkably free of both dogmatic knowledge and interest. Nor is any fear exhibited either of the spreading anarchy of sectarianism or of the wide-spread appearance of religious teachings which were by orthodox Protestant criteria unquestionably heretical. Men in 1650 were no longer obsessed with the ideal of ecclesiastical and dogmatic order; they required rather that civil stability and that intellectual freedom which the modern world has derived from religious toleration. In these petitions of obscure men is to be discovered the substance from which religious toleration was to be formed and the broad base of support upon which its future as a political and religious principle was to depend.

II

ANGLICAN THOUGHT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION, 1640-1660

A. THE ANGLICAN EXTREMISTS

Cromwell's failure to find a means by which moderate Anglicanism might be incorporated into the comprehensive frame of his system of administrative tolerance is all the more regrettable because the general structure of Anglican thought during the revolutionary decades was remarkably and consistently tolerant and liberal. The fact is that Cromwell and the Puritans as well grossly over-estimated the strength which the Anglo-Catholic extremists possessed in the Church of England. The momentary power and prestige of the Laudian extremists rested upon no surer foundations than the ill-advised support of an unwise king and the administrative authority wielded with such powerful but divisive effects within the Church of England by a small group of Laudian nominees. The weakness and intellectual bankruptcy of Anglican extremism is adequately displayed by the fact that no defence of Episcopacy came from the Anglo-Catholic leaders or thinkers in the fateful days when the Church was under violent attack in the House of Commons.¹ Rather it devolved upon the moderate and traditional party, men themselves in exile or under a repression that could upon occasion become persecution, not only to defend the communion of the traditional Church but to restore in a notable corpus of writings its comprehensive and tolerant foundations. The suggestion that the Laudian extremists did not rise to the defence of the institution which their policy had exposed to such mortal danger because they were in personal peril is not valid; those brave spirits who undertook its defence were themselves subject to the most grievous danger and libellous abuse. The ultimate test of tolerance is the capacity to remain tolerant and serene when under the lash of repression, and

¹ *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 30-31, *et passim*.

this the moderate Anglicans were able conspicuously to accomplish.

It may be emphasized, indeed, that the extremist position was bankrupt both in intellectual strength and in actual physical numbers following the execution of the indomitable Laud. A careful survey of the literature discloses very few divines who attempted during the revolutionary era to sustain the intransigent and certainly unhistorical theory by which Laud had divided the Church and by which his party had momentarily robbed it of its tremendous spiritual strength in the nation. Those who wrote as Anglican extremists were for the most part royalists rather than churchmen; their philosophy is derived rather from their devotion to the king than from either an understanding of or sympathy with the Church of England. During the entire period from the convention of the Long Parliament to the restoration of the monarchy there is not a single philosophical or theological defence of the Anglo-Catholic position. Ironically and tragically, moderate and traditional Anglicanism found its footing and regained a measure of its magnificent strength during a period when the fortunes of the Church were at a low ebb and when its communion could be but imperfectly maintained. It was the peculiar, though perhaps inevitable, tragedy of Cromwell's life that he and revolutionary England as well estimated the nature of Anglican thought by the writings and actions of men whose philosophy stemmed from politics rather than from religion.

The royalist extremists urged with libellous vigour the view that sectarianism had proved to be disastrously disruptive in both church and state. It was argued that the proof of the necessity for the rigorous discipline which Laud had imposed was found in the rapid spread of error and sectarianism directly the restraining hand of authority had been relaxed. John Cleveland ironically suggested:

"Your godly wisdom hath found out,
The true religion, without doubt;
For sure among so many,
We have five hundred at the least,
Is not the Gospel much increast?
All must be pure if any."¹

¹ Cleveland, John, *The Parliament* (c. 1647), in Wilkins, W. W., *Political ballads of the 17th and 18th centuries* (L., 1860), I, 30.

Error has sired error in England. Each sect pleads for toleration while at the same time it endeavours to secure mastery in the nation. The land has in consequence been torn by an anarchistic struggle for sectarian superiority. The Church can regain her pure estate only by "vanquishing these sects and heresies" with the civil sword.¹

The extremist Anglican attack upon sectarianism was so vituperative and so evidently propagandist in its inception that it deserves but slight treatment in a consideration of the thought of the period. It is remarkable, one anonymous writer gibed, "that most of your perverse sects have not wry mouths, for very few of you do speak right at any time."² All order has been destroyed and the sacred substance of religion has been profaned by rude lay hands that have striven to mould it to secular purposes. It may be said, indeed, that

"Religion's made a tennis-ball,
For every fool to play withall,
Both which we have so many,
'That we disputed have so long
'Bout which is right, and which is wrong,
Till we have hardly any."³

The royalist pamphleteers were quick to sense the fact that the earnest discussion of the issue of toleration by classes of men hitherto inarticulate betokened the end of a religious era. One writer hotly alleged that the "crooked-law Lattin" learning of the sectaries "hath got you with child with rebellion; and being with child you long to swallow churches, and devour authority."⁴

Anarchy in religion and civil war in politics have been the consequences of the unrestrained application of the principle of private judgment. Every new sect has claimed a divine revelation as the source of its authority, "not so much to amuse the vulgar, as to secure their tenets from the hazard of disputes, and exempt their persons and actions from the test of examina-

¹ *The Anabaptists late protestation. Or, their resolution to depart the city of London, etc.* (L., 1647), no pagin.

² *Tom Nash his ghost, etc.* (L., 1642).

³ W[illis], H[umphrey], *England's changeling, etc.* (L., 1659), in Hazlitt, W. C., *Fugitive tracts written in verse which illustrate the condition of religious and political feeling in England, etc.* (L., 1875), 6.

⁴ *Tom Nash his ghost*, 5-6.

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tion.”¹ This is the logical and inevitable fruit of the doctrine of religious toleration, which has bestowed upon sectarianism such an ardent strength. Sober and pious men must muse:

“Some good those wicked imps of hell have done,
We may choose our religions all, or none;
Or any that will please our fancies well;
We may be pagan, Jew, Turke, Infidell;
Or the religion of a horse or mule.”²

Satan has secured the greatest of his triumphs by encompassing the ruin of the organic Church through the explosive force of sectarianism. Beaumont bitterly charged that:

“. . . ev’n that roundhead, like his master’s foot
Is clov’n, and into two new monsters split;
The Presbyterian (once the only root,
Now but a branch,) and Independent; fit
And hopeful twins, and like to multiply
Into a more-and-more divided fry.”³

These sentiments of the Anglican extremists reflect a bitter and uncompromising hatred of the sectarian strength which for a season gained the seat of power in England. The denunciation of sectarianism, we may believe, proceeded rather from the political views of the writers than from any vital concern with the fate of the Church of England. This was a temper of mind which was irreconcilable and which dominated those inflexible spirits that followed the future Charles II into exile. There is abundant reason for suggesting that it was not typical of Anglican thought in this period—a thought that had been chastened and tempered by the sufferings of war and by the evident weakness of the Anglo-Catholic position. But, unhappily, none of the revolutionary governments was able to distinguish between the royalist incendiaries, who by the very requirements of sovereignty must be crushed, and the great body of moderate Anglican thought which might have been

¹ Featley, Daniel, *A warning for England, especially for London, in the famous history of the frantick Anabaptists, etc.* (L., 1647), 241.

² *A flattering elegie, upon the death of King Charles, etc.* (L., 1649), in Hazlitt, *Fugitive tracts*, 3.

³ Beaumont, Joseph, *Psyche*, canto xx, 39, in *The complete poems, etc.* (ed. by A. B. Grosart) ([Edinburgh], 1880).

tolerated within the comprehensive Church which the capacious mind of Cromwell envisaged.

The royalist extremists were even more unsparing in their denunciation of the Presbyterians, whom they accused with some justice of seeking to found a new and exclusive establishment in England. It may be held, in fact, that royalist policy erred fatally in over-estimating the strength of the Presbyterian party in England and in singling it out as the arch foe both of the church and of the monarchy. In the writings of a thinker like Cleveland the denunciation of Puritan orthodoxy boiled with a fury very nearly hysterical. Scotland was

"A land where one may pray with cursed intent,
O, may they never suffer banishment!
Had Cain been Scot, God would have changed his doom;
Not forced him wander but confined him home."¹

Avarice and hunger, Cleveland alleged, were the source and inspiration of the meddling faith of the Scots.² They have forged an unholy alliance with rebellious and impious men in England in order to prostitute religion to the base ends of political ambition.³ They have bowed the conscience of a nation before an unholy Covenant and have "exhausted . . . their sulphurous contents" in pulpits consecrated to the worship of Almighty God.⁴

The arrogance of the Presbyterians, it was maintained, was equalled only by their unbelievable duplicity. For many years these men cried out for liberty of conscience and boasted that the repression which was levied against them was the hallmark of their own sainthood.⁵ But directly they gained even a partial authority they instantly renounced their former tenderness for conscience and accomplished the destruction of the Church with every instrument which a persecuting zeal could commend. "Are these the tribe of saints," Beaumont enquired:

¹ Cleveland, John, *Poems, etc.* (ed. by J. M. Berdan) (N.Y., 1903), 148.

² *Ibid.*, 149-150.

³ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁵ [Chestlin,], *Persecutio Undecima. The churches eleventh persecution. Or, a brieve of the Puritan persecution of the Protestant clergy of the Church of England, etc.* ([L.], 1648), 71.

"who boast that they
 Possessed are of faith's monopoly?
 Ah, dead and rotten faith, which can display
 No fruit to prove the root's vivacity."¹

These are the men who employed the persuasive arguments of religious toleration in order to secure the sceptre of power in England, a power which they immediately sought to exploit and maintain by the hideous pretensions of infallibility.²

It may be held, in fine, that the ruin which has fallen upon the Church of England has been accomplished by the fruition of a dangerous Erastian tendency and by the subtly divisive force of the doctrine of toleration. The fate of religion, an interesting pamphlet argued, had actually been placed at the mercy of Parliament by the facts of the Reformation. The faith of a Christian nation came to depend upon historical accidents of government and to serve the ends of politics. The brutal Erastianism of the Long Parliament therefore must be regarded as the final fruit of Erastianism.³ This sacrilegious trend in English history was further implemented by the slow accretion of the view that the state enjoyed no responsibility for the spiritual welfare of its subjects.⁴ Erastianism attained its final triumph in the conviction that the state imposes religious toleration in order to secure a firmer and more stable basis for its own sovereignty. Such a persuasion involves a complete disavowal of the religious duties of the magistrate and is posited upon a purely secular view of human society which robs the National Church of the sanctions of its authority and which mortally vitiates the sources of its spiritual strength.

It will be observed that the disorganized body of extremist Anglican thought which we have been examining was dedicated to attack rather than to defence. The literature of the

¹ Beaumont, *Psyche*, canto xii, 189.

² Y., D., *Legenda lignea: with an answer to Mr. Birchleys Moderator, etc.* (L., 1653), 51.

³ [Chestlin], *Persecutio Undecima*, 51 ff.

⁴ *A declaration of the Christian-free-born subjects of the once flourishing kingdom of England. Making out the principles relating both to their spiritual and civil liberties, etc.* (L., 1659), 2-5; Knutton, Immanuel, *Seven questions about the controversie betweene the Church of England, and the Separatists and Anabaptists, breifly discussed, etc.* (L., 1645), 3.

period reveals no systematic or seriously argued *apologia* for the general position which the Anglo-Catholic leaders of the Church sought to impose upon a recalcitrant and eventually rebellious England in the decade prior to the convention of the Long Parliament. Only two writers defend with conviction the exaggerated conception of the royal supremacy which Laud and his followers were obliged to expound as the source of an ecclesiastical authority which had but slight support either in the church or in the nation at large.

An interesting manuscript treatise, probably written between 1640 and 1645, argued that the chief government of the realm, in both lay and ecclesiastical causes, was vested by God in the king. In fact, the power which was divinely wielded by the Jewish monarchs has been retained by the Christian rulers of a later age. This divine power is derived from "the ordinance of God himself, founded in the prime law of nature and clearly established by express texts both of the Old and New Testaments."¹ Furthermore, the power of the king to order the Church has been amply confirmed in English history and law, which have bestowed upon the prince supreme authority in the Church without reference to Parliament. The religious capacity of the ruler is, in fact, "by the law both of God and nature" inseparably "annexed to, and inherent in, the king's royall person."² When the supreme spiritual power of the Christian monarch is invaded by sectarian factions and is divided by religious disputes, civil unrest and the ruin of the Christian Church must inevitably ensue. Resistance to the legally ordered religious establishment is consequently both sinful and rebellious. From this position there can be no escape. Even though the king should command "the most superstitious, idolatrous, prophane, or irreligious things which can be imagined; yet I say we must not rebell, unlesse we will renounce Christianity."³ This position, which ignored the cold and stubborn realities of contemporary politics, had in point of fact been renounced by

¹ *Some collections out of the articles, injunctions, canons, and constitutions ecclesiastical of the Church of England*, Sloan MSS. (BM), 2445, f.9.

² *Ibid.*, 10.

³ [Morton, Thomas], *The necessity of Christian subjection. Demonstrated, and proved by the doctrine of Christ and the Apostles . . . that the power of the king is not of humane, but of divine right, etc.* (Oxford, 1643), 13.

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

all of the Anglican thinkers save those few whose intransigence was whetted by overwhelming opposition.

The defence which the extremists lent to a narrowly defined conception of the Church of England was neither systematic nor well sustained. These writers were imbued with a nostalgia which was as bitter as it was despondent. They felt that

"The state in Strafford fell, the church in Laud;
The twins of public rage, adjudged to die
For treasons they should act by prophecy;

Be dull, great spirits, and forbear to climb,
For worth is sin and eminence a crime."¹

They complained that "there is no church; religion is grown so much of late that she's increased to none."² A noble and virtuous Church has been destroyed by a blind and fanatical fury which could charge nothing more against her than that her fabric was marked with superficial imperfections.³ Only a few of the more deranged zealots who accomplished her ruin dared allege that she was not a Church in which salvation could be gained. These men have divided the seamless robe of Christ and have delivered a Christian community to the anarchy of an irresponsible sectarianism.⁴ England may well bemoan her fate when she comes at last to know that

"A thousand waspish syllogisms will
Be buzzing from the mouths of those who build
Their groundworks of religion on the skill
With which they proudly think their brains are fill'd;
"Till queries, doubts, distinctions, niceties
Breed fretful schisms, and pois'nous heresies."⁵

B. MODERATE (TRADITIONAL) ANGLICAN THOUGHT

In sharp contrast to the intransigent thought of the political Anglicans stood the great body of Anglican thought which was

¹ Cleveland, *Poems*, 153.

² *Ibid.*, 152.

³ L., W., *The bramble berry: or, a brieve discourse touching participating in mixt assemblies at the sacrament of the Lords Supper, etc.* (L., 1643), 4-7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵ Beaumont, *Psyche*, canto xii, 103; *et cf.* cantos xi, 122-123, 138-139, 225, xii, 212-227, xvi, 203.

matured and mellowed in the harsh strife of civil conflict. The strength and nobility of moderate Anglicanism during these critical years of revolution has been gravely neglected because historical attention has been focused upon a militant and triumphant sectarianism, and, perhaps more importantly, because of the triumph of a narrow and illiberal leadership in the Church at the time of the Restoration. But the Anglican thinkers who maintained the traditions and the institutional structure of the Church during the period of danger and defeat exhibited a rare and generous tolerance, bore themselves with an amazing calmness and magnanimity in the face of institutional ruin and personal misfortune, and engrafted into the body of Anglican thought those teachings of the Latitudinarians which, had they been accepted in time, might have prevented the holocaust of war. The striking and historically important fact is that with the notable exception of Taylor all of the great Anglican thinkers who so effectively enriched the thought of the Church during the period of defeat had died or were stricken with the infirmities of age by the time of the Restoration. The leadership of the Church passed to younger men in 1660—men who had attained their maturity during the Civil War and who were fated to break decisively and, as time was to show, permanently with the Elizabethan tradition of comprehension which the last of the great school of Anglican thinkers so richly enlarged.

I. JOHN DAVENANT, 1576-1641

The temper of the great moderate divines of the revolutionary period is well exemplified in a notable work published in 1641 under the title, *An Exhortation to the Restoring of Brotherly Communion betwixt the Protestant Churches*. This book, published just prior to the outbreak of civil war in England, was probably from the pen of John Davenant, one of the ablest and certainly one of the most tolerant of all the seventeenth-century bishops.¹ The work clearly exhibits the persuasive

¹ See the *D.N.B.* for an excellent notice of this somewhat neglected career. This authority attributes the *Exhortation* to Davenant, as has most recent research on the problem.

influence of the Latitudinarian position which it advances with fine clarity and strength at a moment when the counsels of extremism prevailed in England.

The writer summoned Englishmen to view the quarrels and disputes which divided them with a larger perspective and with a truer reference to the spirit and meaning of the Christian faith professed by all religious groups in the kingdom. Those zealous spirits, who so gravely damage the substance of charity, should be brought by reflection to see that they stand in awful danger of destroying the Church in the name of doctrines and points of view which can never be certainly sustained.¹ In fact, it must be recognized that all the Protestant Churches grasp the saving essentials of faith and are in God's view members of one communion.² Some of them, perhaps all of them, are stricken with errors, "but charity forbids us, by unjust dissensions to start asunder from those erring Churches, who stick to the foundation," lest we incur as a reward for our zeal the odium of schism.³ No sect and no church can require the religious conscience to accept as a condition of faith any teaching beyond the essential doctrines of Christianity, though this is precisely the error into which every church has fallen.

Furthermore, it seems evident that every Church, including the Roman, is a true Church in the sense that salvation may be found within its communion. For the fundamentals of faith are very simple and are almost universally held. Those things which are essential are patent and when we seek to make more difficult the way of salvation we err very grievously as persecutors of conscience.⁴ All that is necessary for our salvation is to be found in the Apostles' Creed, which, it should ever be remembered, states very precisely the limits of our communion though not of our tolerance.⁵ This in no sense means that churches and individuals may not grow in knowledge and advance towards a fuller understanding of truth. But it does mean very definitely that no man and no church professing this creed, the maximum foundation of our faith, may be condemned as heretical.⁶

¹ [Davenant, John], *An exhortation to the restoring of brotherly communion betwixt the Protestant churches, etc.* (L., 1641), 2-5.

² *Ibid.*, 84-85. ³ *Ibid.*, 92. ⁴ *Ibid.*, 50-51. ⁵ *Ibid.*, 71. ⁶ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

No confusion and very little heresy, then, may be said to harass the Church in any matter of essential importance. We war upon each other and break the bounds of charity in the pursuit of obscure questions which are insoluble and which therefore arm our uncertainty with the wrath of persecution. A merciful God has made the path of our salvation broad and easy; it is man who has dug the pits and removed the sign-boards along that way. We renounce our charity and despoil our tolerance when we abandon the sound fundamentals "to dive deeper into the mysteries of faith . . . and thence to draw consequences by the help of our reason, and to annexe them to the fundamentall articles."¹ We add speculations to knowledge and consume charity with pride and arrogance. The cruel temper of the persecutor is bred by the fact that every man "dotes on the darlings of his own braines" and desires to invest his own opinions with the infallible authority of the scriptures themselves. All arrogant men, but especially the divines, have been guilty of this blasphemous presumption. For the divines have patently striven more "to tune the scriptures to their opinion, than their opinions to the scripture, and by head and shoulders drag the fundamentall articles of Christian faith, to the supporting of their doctrines not fundamental."² Thus it is that the churches have drifted far from their moorings and that the world has been consumed by wars which, though waged in the name of religion, have considerably less than nothing to do with religion.

Davenant, with the English crisis in mind, urged the high necessity of fleeing back to the essential foundations of faith. There peace and charity have their seat. The rigour of compulsion must quickly be softened by the solvent of tolerance; the fences which a narrow and rigid zeal has thrown across the fertile fields of faith must be levelled by a larger charity. Men who profess the same faith and who worship the same God must not war upon each other in the name of God and faith. Above all else, however, the ponderous structure of doctrine which wit and pride have raised must be reduced to its demonstrable proportions. We must be very scrupulous indeed lest in the articles of our faith we invent that which "is subtile, super-

¹ [Davenant], *Exhortation*, 5.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

fluous, and litigious." For surely it "is not the part of wise doctors, to stuffe those things, which should further peace, and the edification of soules, with that which may trouble the learned" and destroy the ignorant by giving them "wind for milk, and stones for bread."¹

The *Exhortation* exhibits a mind and temper of rare balance, of sensitive charity, and of noble tolerance. It demonstrates, as do so many works in this revolutionary era, that the peculiar integrity of mind which the moderate man possesses is not of necessity destroyed when the desperate counsels of extremism hold the reins of politics within their grasp. Davenant accepts and extends the tolerant solution to the religious crisis in England which the greater moderates had argued so eloquently and fruitlessly a few years earlier. England did not heed their warning; it required two decades of disastrous struggle, the ruinous sway of inflamed sectarian bitterness, and the slow cooling of incandescent conceptions of exclusive truth, before the nation learned in the harsh school of historical experience the truths which a galaxy of illustrious spirits had argued with such fine passion and such prophetic certainty. It is ever the fate of the moderate to be crushed between the onrushing waves of destroying extremisms; it is ever his vindication that the society that has been inundated and wasted by the destructive violence of fanaticism nourishes itself in its slow convalescence with the salutary draughts of reason and sane moderation which it has earlier rejected.

2. THOMAS FULLER, 1608-1661

It was the essential virtue of the Anglican moderates that they were able to retain their equanimity and sanity, to stand firm in the broad middle ground of their thought, despite the narrowing circle of war and fanaticism which hemmed them in. Nor did these men find refuge for their tolerance in that inconspicuousness which Hobbes recommended for those who would retain integrity of thought. Most of these men were clergymen who had been distinguished at the time war broke out in England and as Anglicans they wrote under the searching

¹ [Davenant], *Exhortation*, 41.

glare of an angry public opinion. Yet they stood fast and were able by the example of their own courage and charity to exercise a profoundly important moderating influence in the midst of war and sectarian strife. These men were the true martyrs of Anglicanism.

One of the greatest of this able group, however, was far too good humoured and far too resilient ever to regard himself as a martyr, far too healthy in his sentiments and tastes ever to fall victim to that persecution complex from which both martyrdom and fanaticism can so easily spring. Thomas Fuller, a nephew to John Davenant, was already well known in 1640 as a great preacher and as one of the most liberal thinkers in the Church of England. We have previously commented upon his connection with the moderate group of Anglican thinkers who preserved the comprehensive and tolerant traditions of the Church during the critical Laudian era. He had spoken vigorously against the barbarity of putting heretics to death and had revealed sceptical doubts concerning the possibility of determining with any accuracy between heresy and truth. Though persuaded that a decent uniformity of worship was necessary for a healthy religious life in the nation, he had been unequivocal in his denunciation of all forcing of conscience.¹ Sympathetic in his temper, witty and salty in his conversation, high-minded in his conduct, and resolute in his charity, Fuller stood free of all party commitments and numbered amongst his friends men of all persuasions. "His burly frame, his broad countenance beaming with good-nature, betokened a man with whom it was impossible to quarrel."² Yet his good temper and his charitable disposition masked a mind of inflexible integrity, a mind that steadily declined to be deluded by sectarian persuasion or to lend itself as an instrument in the service of any intolerance, whether Puritan or royalist.

Fuller's career is a valuable document for the history of the survival of a liberal mind in a period of clashing ideologies. He sought in the early years of the crisis to serve the cause of

¹ *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 51, 150-151, 154, for a consideration of Fuller's early thought.

² Gardiner, S. R., *History of the Great Civil War, etc.* (L., 1904-1905), I, 277.

peace and moderation, not only as a preacher and writer but as a man of some public influence. He sat as a member of Bishop Williams's committee which strove manfully to prepare a programme of reform that might preserve the Church of England against the rapid erosion of revolutionary change.¹ At the same time, he threw his influence to the peace party led by Holles and Maynard which was searching vainly for some political formula that might prevent the complete disintegration of the political society. His great *Fast Sermons*, preached in late 1642, emphasized the fact that truth and honour were to be found in both of the armed camps which divided England, and he commented enthusiastically upon the spiritual renaissance that had followed the relaxation of Laudian repression. But he warned England that truth and moderation, even religion itself, must perish when men submitted their ideals to the trial of arms. England, he urged in the *Sermon of Reformation*, preached in July, 1643, must find the firm foundations of tolerance and sanity in the broad middle ground between the bigotry of Laud and the tyranny of the Presbyterians.²

But, Fuller, like Erasmus, was driven by mounting fanaticism to range himself somewhat tentatively and with profoundly significant reservations upon the side of tradition and conservatism. When ordered to subscribe to the *Covenant*, Fuller, alarmed at the arrogance of Presbyterian orthodoxy, retired to Oxford, where he was to offend his royalist auditors by his refusal to condemn unsparingly the morals and the integrity of the parliamentary opposition.³ He returned to London before the end of the War and during the remainder of the revolutionary period preached and wrote with remarkably little restraint in defence of the moderate position to which he had clung with such resolute consistency.⁴

Fuller's experience with a sectarian zeal which derived its fanaticism from the conviction that absolute truth could be infallibly determined confirmed his earlier scepticism concerning the absolute nature of truth. The tolerance of his thought

¹ Vide Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 25, 28.

² Fuller, Thomas, *A sermon of reformation, etc.* (L., 1643), 10-11, 16-18.

³ Freund, Michael, *Die Idee der Toleranz im England der grossen Revolution* (Halle/Saale, 1927), 58.

⁴ Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 199-200.

was based upon a sophisticated persuasion that everything in the world is imperfect, that the visage of truth is concealed by mists of ignorance which are but slowly being dispelled, and that all institutions and all thought require constant adjustment to the evolutionary unfolding of a richer and maturer knowledge. It is therefore criminally intolerant and essentially impious to cast truth and the institutions which shelter it into rigid moulds which can be bent only at the terrible price of revolution. Hence he disliked and denounced the certainty and arrogance of both Laud and the Westminster Assembly. The nature of truth is far more complex and variegated than presumptuous minds can possibly know. "Multiformity with mutuall charity advanceth God's glory as much as uniformity it selfe . . . which as the pipes of an organ may be of severall length and bignesse, yet all tuned into good harmony together."¹ The very variety of faith, the very complexity of the worship by which men symbolize their beliefs, assures us that truth is alive and that we are progressing towards that complete knowledge and understanding which we will finally attain in the Kingdom of God.² Hence tolerance and charity were rooted deep in the foundations of Fuller's thought. So evident and so instinctive were these conclusions to an essentially sceptical mind that the great Anglican historian never brought them into systematic organization.

This view does not assume, Fuller clearly indicated, that heresy which involves the repudiation of the fundamentals of Christian belief is to be taken lightly. We must first, however, define the fundamentals as broadly and as precisely as possible and then be scrupulously certain that that which we condemn as heresy is not simple disagreement. No man can be avoided as an heretic who does not obstinately "bolt and barre" his eyes against the light of truth.³ Heresy in this true sense is of course extremely rare and even when it is indubitably determined our course against it must be moderate.⁴ For we must

¹ Fuller, Thomas, *The appeal of injured innocence, etc.* (L., 1659), iii, 20.

² Freund, *Die Idee der Toleranz*, 59, et vide Gardiner's remarks, *Civil War*, I, 285.

³ Fuller, Thomas, *Joseph's party-coloured coat, etc.* (L., 1640), 11-12.

⁴ Coleridge's slighting remarks on the impossibility of treating an admitted heresy moderately would seem to indicate an essential misunderstanding,

ever bear in mind the fact that force is under no circumstances a proper instrument for the correction of heresy. "The best and onely way to purge these errors out, is in a faire and peaceable way; for the sword cannot discerne betwixt error and falshood, it may have two edges, but hath never an eye."¹ The certain end of persecution is the prostitution of the Church to the ambitions of intemperate and arrogant men and the dissolution of the civil society by the hot blasts which sectarian intolerance inspires.

Fuller ever stressed with a sly and deprecatory humour his own really heroic devotion to the principles of moderation. He constantly reflected, with a rather pessimistic view of human nature that never turned into the bitter potion which Hobbes drank, upon the stupidity and blindness which impel men to rush on to their destruction in the flames which their own fanaticism have lighted. He related in his *Mixt Contemplations* that he had been born in a parish equidistant between the birth-place of Robert Browne, the founder of Congregationalism, and that of Francis Tresham, the Catholic zealot of Gunpowder Plot fame.² "My nativity," he wrote, "may minde me of moderation, whose cradle was rocked betwixt two rocks. Now seeing I was never such a churle as to desire to eat my morsel alone, let such who like my prayer joyn with me therein. God grant we may hit the golden mean, and endeavour to avoid all extremes; the frantick Anabaptist on the one side, and the fiery zeal of the Jesuite on the other."³ The peculiar tragedy of the English Civil War, he steadily insisted, was that it might have been prevented had men who called themselves Christian been willing to make reasonable compromises in matters in no sense involving their Christianity. But, unhappily, neither the hot spirits in the Anglican party nor the rigid Puritans would relent at all from extremist positions which speedily grew irreconcilable.⁴ The ruin of religion was accomplished in England by fanatics who would "abate not an hairs

not only of Fuller's thought but of the history of thought during this period generally. (Coleridge, S. T., *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* [ed. by H. N. Coleridge] [L., 1836-1839], II, 384.)

¹ Fuller, Thomas, *A fast sermon preached on Innocents day, etc.* (L., 1642), 13.

² Fuller, Thomas, *Mixt contemplations in better times* (L., 1660), ii, 64.

³ *Ibid.*, ii, 64-65.

⁴ Fuller, *Church history*, VI, 191.

breadth in order to unity," by hot spirits who "will take all, but tender nothing, make motions with their mouthes, but none with their feet for peace, not stirring a step towards it."¹

Fuller found no hope in the deadly struggles which divided opposed systems of exclusive truth save the possibility that intolerance might burn itself out. England must learn that comprehension and tolerance afford the only stable basis for peace and alone ensure to the human conscience that liberty requisite to its safety and maturity. The vigour of the Church has been benumbed and its mission obscured by the fatal and chronic dissensions which have wracked it.² The fault lies "not in the religion, but in the professors of it, that of late wee have beene more unhappy in killing of Christians, then happy in converting of pagans."³ The term heresy has been nothing else than the cloak of avarice and the engine of an indiscriminate destruction. God Himself has been outraged by the desperate ends to which impious men have put His Church and His truth, "When wee are about with censuring, to murder the credits of many together, let us take heed," Fuller solemnly warned, "that there be not some orthodoxe amongst those whom we condemn al to be hereticks; some that desire to bee peaceable in this our Israel, amongst those whom wee condemne for all factious schismaticks."⁴

England would have suffered unjustly and cruelly indeed, Fuller wrote in 1660, if she had not learned the irrefutable lessons which tolerance has to teach in the terrible fires of a civil war inspired by religion. He urged with an almost desperate earnestness, at the moment when a royalist reaction was setting in, that the Church of England should be restored along those tolerant and comprehensive designs which Elizabeth had first fabricated, which Hooker had defended with luminous reason, which the Latitudinarians had expanded to the inclusion of all Christians, and which the Anglican moderates had nobly maintained intact under severe and occasionally violent repression. Nor was that all. Those sects that cannot accept the communion of the Church must be extended a generous tolera-

¹ Fuller, *Mixt contemplations*, i, 32.

² Fuller, Thomas, *Feare of losing the old light*, etc. (L., 1645), 10-11.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ Fuller, *Joseph's party-coloured coat*, 7.

tion which permits them to worship freely according to the light of reason and conscience. The necessity of social security and the very nature of religion counsel the acceptance of the principles of religious liberty as the foundation upon which a new and greater England must be built. The healing balm of charity and tolerance alone can assuage and finally cure the rankling bitterness which has been the fruit of intolerance and immoderation.¹

These noble and inspired phrases provide the final vindication of Fuller's rare tolerance. His was a tolerance seated firmly in a philosophy of life and in a serenity of faith that raised him above the consuming passions of his age. His was a career that confirms the integrity and nobility of a liberal and magnanimous mind. For Thomas Fuller had remained, through the most trying period of modern English history, consistently and passionately devoted, with an almost instinctive certainty, to the cause of moderation and tolerance. The weight of the strong and intemperate hand of Laud upon a Church which Fuller defined with a clearer and a larger view, the hot passions of war and the sufferings of his own beloved Church in the revolutionary era, the strong wine of the Anglican triumph in 1660—none of these subtly ruinous forces was able to bend or warp the stout trunk of this man's thought. Thomas Fuller stood strong and firm in the tempestuous gales of fanaticism and bigotry as a landmark for his own and subsequent ages.

3. JEREMY TAYLOR, 1613-1667

a. Introduction

The point of view of the moderate Anglican group received its fullest and finest expression in the thought of Jeremy Taylor. As a young divine Taylor had been favoured by Archbishop Laud, who was attracted by the brilliance of his preaching and the distinction of his style. But during the formative years prior to the outbreak of civil war Taylor absorbed far more from the Latitudinarians, with whose thought he must be intimately associated, than from the meagre and untraditional thought of the Anglo-Catholic party. Taylor has usually been

¹ Fuller, *Mixt contemplations*, i, 55.

studied in the light of his great classic, *The Liberty of Prophesying*, too little attention having been paid to the corpus of his considerable writings, which place his thought in clearer perspective and which afford a more systematic estimate of its importance in the development of religious toleration. His greatest work was published in 1647, in time to lend considerable strength to the attack of the Independents and their liberal and radical allies upon the threat of a new and dangerous orthodox intolerance.¹ There is convincing evidence to indicate, moreover, that *The Liberty of Prophesying* was begun several years before it was finally prepared for publication at Taylor's isolated retreat in Wales.²

Taylor was evidently deeply influenced by the great moderate thinkers, Chillingworth, Hales, Falkland, and the others, whose works were appearing during the days of his early ministry and whose general religious and philosophical position he adopted with the inevitable accommodations which the fact of war wrought upon the body of his thought.³ The breadth of his religious views likewise made it possible for Taylor to comprehend Independency and moderate Presbyterianism within his conception of the Church. He thereby placed his pen in more than casual alliance with the powerful groups that had discovered in the principle of religious toleration the vision of a larger spiritual horizon and of a more settled social order. Taylor argued his case from the careful foundations which the Latitudinarians had laid, but brought to the defence of the principles which they had advanced a more pragmatic consideration of details and a thoughtful scepticism born of war and disillusionment.

The thought of this brilliant divine was soundly based, and the comprehensive grasp which he displayed in bringing into

¹ Taylor's *The Liberty of Prophesying* was widely quoted by all the groups pleading the cause of religious liberty.

² Taylor complained that he had few books in Wales. It is difficult to believe that the wealth of exact reference with which the book is embellished could have been carried even in his capacious mind. There are several textual indications, as well, which would seem to suggest that the work may have been begun some years earlier, perhaps in 1643.

³ For other comments on Taylor's connection with the Latitudinarians, see Gardiner, *Civil War*, III, 311; Lecky, *Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism*, II, 86-87; *Cambridge History of English Literature*, VII, 163.

consideration the ultimate complexities of the problem of toleration immediately established him as the intellectual leader of the moderate Anglican group. Others of that party were personally more tolerant; others pleaded for a larger liberty; but none possessed the same clarity of expression, the same honest disposition to face all the difficulties, or the same luminous capacity for expression. Taylor clearly exhibits in his thought the chastening effect which adversity may have upon a sensitive mind, the horrified realization of precisely what the struggle of embattled orthodoxies for supremacy means in terms of faith and shattered human lives. His impressionable and conservative nature was deeply grieved by the tragedy which had engulfed the historic Church and he was quick to assess against her a portion of the blame for what had occurred in England. He wrote during a dark moment in the history of that Church but he was evidently almost unconsciously framing the timbers of reconstruction, timbers which would support a more tolerant and comprehensive Establishment. The religious anger which divided and inflamed England appeared to him a mockery upon the charity of God and a travesty upon the nature of religion. Taylor saw, as did many other deeply pious and instinctively tolerant spirits, that men and women joined in the invisible unity of Christ were through ignorance, avarice, and too rigid zeal destroying each other in His name.

The corrosive consequences upon English religious thought of the bitter and irreconcilable conflict between opposed systems of exclusive truth are amply demonstrated in Taylor's writings. We have had frequent occasion to observe that England had concluded at the close of the revolutionary era that absolute truth, and consequently uniformity, could not be gained, or that the price which society had to pay for its attainment was too great. This persuasion led some men into indifference, others into a modified conception of faith which can only be described as sceptical, but in either case the significance for religious toleration is very great. Taylor's thought is instinct with a brooding scepticism and with a largeness of view which very nearly associates him with lay Christianity. The conviction that truth cannot be precisely determined is centrally important in his philosophy and from it tolerance flows as a necessary

consequence. The structure of his dogma was, indeed, so broadly framed that he quite escapes from the inflexible doctrinal commitments upon which the seventeenth century drew its battle lines.

Taylor made a considerable contribution to the development of the theory of religious toleration and decisively influenced the growth of a mature body of Anglican thought which accurately reflected the tolerant and liberal sentiments of the mass of lay opinion within the Church of England. Yet it is possible to view too enthusiastically the significance of his thought and to appraise too highly the extent of his contribution to the development of religious liberty. Certainly it cannot reasonably be said that he was the first to defend religious toleration as an abstract right or that he was the first to support liberty of conscience as a political necessity.¹ Nor can we justly condemn him as hypocritical or declare that his contribution to the history of ideas was vitiated by his subsequent conduct as an Irish bishop.² Taylor, as Bishop of Down and Connor, found himself in an extremely difficult position, caught between the cross-fire of the Catholics on his right and militantly marshalled sectaries on his left. Nor was he enthusiastically supported by the reactionary elements in his own communion which distrusted both his liberal theology and his reputation as the leader of the moderate school of Anglican thought. In his sermon to the Irish Parliament (1661) and to the University of Dublin (1662) the bishop dealt honestly and somewhat pathetically with the difficulties he had experienced in applying by administrative practice the theory which he had so ably formulated. Taylor did not quite escape the effects of the heady wine of reaction, and that the historian can fully understand and partially condone. But ideas are subtly stronger than action. The works of Jeremy Taylor stood in 1660 as a monument to a noble and moderate ideal and those works had enjoyed their due influence in that slow shaping of opinion which determines the dynamic of historical development. The immediate actions

¹ This amazing statement has frequently been made by apologists for Taylor. See especially Heber, Reginald, *The Life of the Right Rev. Jeremy Taylor, etc.* (L., 1824; Hartford, Conn., 1832), 37; Gosse, Edmund, *Jeremy Taylor* (L., 1903), 45.

² See Coleridge's scathing comment, *Literary remains*, III, 248.

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of a rather frightened and obscure bishop in an obscure diocese could not seriously vitiate the contributions that had been made to the larger realm of ideas.

Taylor's contribution to the theory of toleration can hardly be regarded, however, as ranking with the great formative works which shaped the principles and supplied the defence of religious liberty. His thought is not especially original and there are very grave deficiencies in the corpus of his theory. He absorbed more than he knew of the thought of the great moderates without wholly acquiring the spirit which animates the pages of a Hales or a Robinson. Taylor's importance in the history of ideas, like that of Locke, may be said to rest upon the fact that he was so widely read and so effectively quoted that his work acquires a significance considerably beyond its own intrinsic merit. For one thing the tolerant arguments of an eminent Anglican divine were likely to influence the conservative mass of English thought far more profoundly than the works of men like Goodwin or Williams, who, while blessed by a greater genius and gifted with a larger view, were as radicals suspect and as sectaries men of dubious reliability. And, finally, Taylor's works were to be influential because they were couched in a literary style of very great distinction. His argument moves with a soothing persuasion and is embellished with rich and compelling imagery and a wealth of impressive reference. The mantle of profound scholarship rested easily upon Jeremy Taylor; the very skill with which he bends his learning to his purpose imparts a vicarious learning upon his flattered reader. His majestic cadences sweep on with ease and impressive weight; a balanced phrase or a subtle figure turns the argument around the rocks of logical difficulty; it is not the steadily piled weight of reason that overwhelms in Taylor but the almost hypnotic persuasion of an almost perfect rhetoric.¹

b. On the obscurity of truth

Taylor did not share the optimism of the earlier moderates on the possibility of finding truth under conditions of freedom.

¹ For other judgments on his style, *vide* Lecky, *Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism*, II, 87; Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy*, I, 349-351.

The decade of party strife and the erosion of grinding systems of absolute truth left him sceptical of the possibility of ever attaining a full knowledge of religious truth. Furthermore, with Fuller, he came to regard the search for truth as more important than its attainment in securing the spiritual development of mankind. All of Taylor's writings are therefore tinged with a tentative attitude on the question of truth and are coloured by a deep and implicit scepticism. He was persuaded that education, environment, and sheer accident have far more to do with the nature of the truth which we profess than the dignity of man permits him to admit. Truth, he almost says, is organic; it gathers substance and mass from the accretions which history adds by trial and error. Hence persecution not only enjoys no basis in authority but actually destroys the means by which truth is enlarged and sustained.

The uncertainty which shrouds the fulness of truth does not, however, in any sense militate against our salvation. God, in His mercy, has made transparently clear those things necessary for our regeneration. But when we proceed, as we should, beyond those fundamentals we discover that the Bible itself is obscured by allegory, mystery, and confusion which stimulate our intellects and tax our tolerance.¹ Any position can be sustained or refuted by the Bible. When, therefore, we leave the solid foundations of the fundamentals we enter an area of pure speculation and it is out of this shadowy frontier of knowledge that all intolerance springs. In this vast area of searching there is no infallible guide to truth. The right of every man to his peculiar opinion is therefore absolute, though, conversely, he enjoys no authority for imposing his views upon other men. These extrinsic questions have no relevancy for our salvation,² but so long as discussion and search are free they form the means by which the circumference of our knowledge is extended. They have, in brief, very great importance in philosophy, none in religion.

¹ Taylor, Jeremy, *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ ἘΚΑΕΚΤΙΚΗ*, or, a discourse of the liberty of prophesying. . . . Shewing the unreasonableness of prescribing to other men's faith, and the iniquity of persecuting differing opinions (L., 1647), in *Whole works of the Right Rev. Jeremy Taylor, etc.* (ed. by R. Heber, revised by C. P. Eden) (L., 1852-1859), V, 410.

² *Ibid.*, Works, V, 417.

We must, therefore, approach these problems with proper humility and with a charitable view of the natural imperfections of mankind. God, we may be sure, deplores the fact that "men study hard and understand little; that they dispute earnestly, and understand not one another at all; that affections creep so certainly, and mingle with their arguing, that the argument is lost." The Christian's realization of the weakness of mankind persuades him to withhold his condemnation. He observes that "all the world (a few individuals excepted) are unalterably determined to the religion of their country, of their family, of their society"; that men are not so much what they desire to be as what history and environment have made them.¹ The varieties of religion are therefore almost as numerous as the types of men. In all the complexity of Christian opinion it is probable that none is completely true and it is certain that none is so false as to merit damnation. We cannot rule certainly in these matters in which we deal rather with probabilities than with truth.² When this is finally appreciated the vicious persuasion which has engendered persecution will have been destroyed.

These facts concerning the nature of truth being understood, it necessarily follows that complete liberty of religious opinion and interpretation must be permitted. Taylor strongly declared that he knew no reason why "men's fancies or understandings should be more bound to be like one another than their faces: and either in all such places of scripture a liberty must be indulged to every honest and peaceable wise man, or else argument from such places must be wholly declined."³ Men inevitably interpret and expound the scriptures in the subjective light of their personal understanding. They do not learn from the Bible, but rather warp Holy Writ to their own preconceptions and prejudices. Hence it is small wonder that "scriptures look like pictures, wherein every man in the room believes they look on him only."⁴ The most violent opinions are maintained in obscure questions that are speedily elevated

¹ Taylor, Jeremy, *A dissuasive from popery* (L., 1664), in *Works*, VI, 477.

² For other comments on Taylor's scepticism, *vide* Hallam, *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, II, 426; Kaufmann, M., *Latitudinarianism and Pietism*, in *Cambridge Modern History* (Cambridge, 1908), V, 748.

³ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 415. ⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 426.

into doctrines to be rigorously and infallibly imposed. Taylor consequently counselled reserve and sceptical refusal to commit oneself to a rigid position even with respect to the fundamental doctrine of all Christian communions. For even this fundamental passage, *hoc est corpus meum*, though completely clear, not only violates the reason but clashes in its literal meaning with other passages quite as clear.¹ There remains in such an instance no choice but to extend complete liberty of judgment to all men and to all churches. For that which is not evident beyond all possibility of confusion is not necessary to our salvation.

We must conclude, therefore, that no man and no church possesses such infallible knowledge that a subjective opinion concerning truth may be generally imposed as absolutely known or necessary. No dogmatic system enjoys more than the fractional chance that it is absolutely correct, and we can scarcely permit our hope of salvation to depend upon the laws of probability. The wise man will consequently decline to accept his faith from the hands of others and if he is likewise a just man will shrink from imposing his opinions upon his fellows.² No man may justly be debarred from the large area of freedom which must rigorously be preserved so long as our knowledge is fallible and our understanding less than omniscient. Persuasion remains the only just instrument of faith; persecution by definition has no place as a weapon in the armoury of the Church.

c. The question of authority

The sceptical view which Taylor had argued with such masterly logic would by a very slight extension deny the basis of all ecclesiastical authority and would establish the theory underlying the philosophy of anarchistic individualism. It is, in other words, extremely difficult to impose authority without

¹ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 417. There are also, he indicates, as many as twenty opinions on the question of justification and at least sixteen judgments on original sin (*ibid.*, *Works*, V, 426). These important doctrines must therefore be relegated to the area of speculation and philosophy.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 426-428.

destroying religious toleration and it is, conversely, quite impossible to repudiate authority without devitalizing the institutional strength of organized religion. This is a grave question which Taylor did not face with complete candour, because his reason led him to deny the basis for substantial authority in religious matters while his sentiments informed him that such authority was necessary if the survival of religious institutions was to be secured. Taylor therefore never fully accepted the position that the individual reason constitutes the sole guide in matters of faith, though his thought crept round the ambit of this view with what Tulloch has aptly described as highly "rationalistic results."¹ Taylor prefers the faith that is strongly and certainly rooted in reason but accepts the validity of that faith which is derived from traditional and customary sources by admission related more nearly to authority than reason.² And one may well enquire whether Taylor was not tolerant in that conclusion, for his view of human nature was not high, and to have insisted upon the necessity of a rational faith would have been to damn the mass of mankind by default.

Taylor considered in a long and careful argument, which very clearly reveals his own preoccupations, the decisively important question of the ultimate source of authority in religion. By general agreement the Bible is the infallible guide, but that is for practical purposes subsidiary to the question of what authority shall prevail in the interpretation of the Bible.³ The traditions of the Church constitute no certain guide since they exhibit as much inconsistency and uncertainty as do the opinions of individual men. By a discursive and learned argument Taylor establishes the further fact that the General Councils possess no more certain guaranty of infallible knowledge than does the opinion of individual men. "There is no general council that hath determined that a general council is infallible; no scripture hath recorded it, no tradition universal hath transmitted to us any such proposition."⁴ Councils were useful so long as the Christian world really sought truth

¹ Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy*, I, 347.

² Freund (*Die Idee der Toleranz*, 52) propounds a different interpretation of Taylor's thought on this important point.

³ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 428-442.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 453.

honestly and humbly, but more recently they have been the instruments wherewith preconceived dogmas have been fastened upon the consciences of mankind. Yet even the most enlightened Council "had no authority . . . to make a divine faith, or to constitute new objects of necessary credence."¹ Taylor, following closely the magnificent logic of Chillingworth, further established that the papacy enjoyed no capacity to rule certainly in matters of faith. Nor can the weight of patristic teaching be seriously considered, since the Fathers have disagreed so violently amongst themselves that any view can be sustained from their writings.² They have little else than antiquity to vest them with credibility. Even Augustine acquired his tremendous reputation long after his death, and "if while he lived his affirmative was no more authority than derives from the credit of one very wise man, against whom also very wise men were opposed, I know not why his authority should prevail further now; for there is nothing added to the strength of his reason since that time."³ The source of authority is therefore not to be discovered in those areas where men have sought it with such persistent and disastrous application.

Finally, it must be said that the ultimate source of authority cannot be vested in the Church visible, much less in the fragments which now compose it. For this Church has never been united in teaching or in worship. We must first determine which of the rigidly defined fragments of the Church is the true Church before we dare lend it our obedience. And to determine this for ourselves is to vest authority in ourselves, since the issues involved are so difficult "that the greatest questions of Christendom are judged before you can get to your judge; and then there is no need of him."⁴ Taylor had brilliantly argued to the repudiation of the institutional discipline by which uniformity of faith and worship were framed and imposed. He was left facing the wastes of individual responsibility, absolutely meant, from which he shrank back just far enough to preserve some measure of orthodoxy and to limit rather importantly the structure of religious liberty.

¹ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 460.

² *Ibid.*, Works, V, 483-485.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 487.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 492-493. Taylor here follows Chillingworth's argument very closely indeed.

Thus it may be stated that we dare not entrust our salvation to an external authority and we must say that he who does so exposes his soul to the vagaries of chance.¹ By a process of exclusion Taylor had established reason as the only infallible guide in religion, yet he viewed even it with some pessimistic reservations. Men must employ their reason for the determination of the opinions upon which their faith rests. But, unhappily, men almost invariably decide rationally in favour of that communion with which they are most familiar and reach their decisions after the examination of very scanty evidence.² It is perhaps best to employ reason in choosing our spiritual guides and then to surrender ourselves to instruction so long as our reason remains persuaded.³ In other words, we should follow the counsel of the Church which we have chosen critically, striving not to confirm its doctrines but to test them rationally. Such a course gives us a double authority for our faith: the sanction of our own reason and the evidence of the Church to whose teachings we lend our support.⁴ But it should ever be borne in mind that we cannot transfer to an institution the responsibility which rests upon us for the attainment of salvation. The very fact that we lend obedience to a particular church is a clear indication that we have made a choice, whether consciously or unconsciously.⁵

It is evident that Taylor had dug with the spade of logic a deep and capacious pit in which to his logical embarrassment he found himself entrapped. By his repudiation of institutional authority in religion he had created a vacuum which could be filled only by transferring spiritual sovereignty without reservations to the individual Christian. This he shrank from doing for at least two evident reasons: first, because he fully realized that such a cession of authority spelled the doom of the organic religious ideal, and, secondly, because he had little confidence that the great mass of men possessed the capacity or the inclination to make rational decisions. Taylor never wholly extricated himself from the confusion into which he had fallen.

The difficulty, he was at last driven bluntly to say, is dis-

¹ Taylor, Jeremy, *Ductor dubitantium. Or, the rule of conscience, etc.* (L., 1660), in *Works*, IX, 198.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, IX, 199.

³ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 494-495.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 495.

⁵ *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 498.

covered in the fact that the reason of ignorant men is of little service to them in making the choices upon which their salvation depends. In such cases it would seem preferable for men to entrust their souls to the authority of the church in which fate has placed them.¹ For it must be admitted that "men are in the dark, and religion is become an art of wrangling; and the writers of controversies are oftentimes abused themselves, and oftener do abuse others; and therefore men are taught certain little rules to grope by, and walk in seas and upon rocks."² When the wise and pious are themselves confused and divided, no more reasonable course seems indicated than to follow the dominant opinion of one's country. We must, however, continue the search for truth, push forward in the quest for a rational faith, undismayed by the conflicting voices and the variety of opinions which surround us in such luxuriant confusion.

Taylor had been driven to an amazing contradiction by the tuition of his own reason. The reason must be absolutely free so long as it is active and competent. But he was deeply persuaded that most men would not and could not employ it in the determination of their faith. Above all, he was fearful that men, once invested with spiritual sovereignty, would wander off into the bottomless morass of private revelation, that reason would destroy itself by merging insensibly with fanaticism. He therefore counselled men to risk their salvation by lending obedience to the traditional faith in which fortune had placed them, with the gloomy reflection that they would probably do precisely this in any case. But Taylor's solution was vitiated by his own argument. For had he not shown that such a course vested faith upon sources of authority of no validity whatsoever, that salvation becomes, indeed, in this instance a matter of mathematical probability? It must be suggested that Taylor's thought hovered close to an abyss of scepticism from which he was restrained by little else than his personal devotion to a Church in which the fortune he recurs to so frequently had seen fit to place him.

¹ Taylor, *Ductor dubitantium*, *Works*, IX, 200.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, IX, 201, 203; Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 495-498.

d. On rigorous courses

It seems evident that Taylor arrived at a theory of toleration by an indirect but none the less effective chain of reasoning. Fundamentally, he declined to vest authority in any institutional organization because he entertained for every species of spiritual coercion a deep-seated and intense aversion. His condemnation swept away the claims which all communions, including his own, had laid to those sanctions that must embody authority.¹ The Church, he carefully insisted, cannot lay scriptural claim to any coercive authority. Even in cases of serious heresy it can do no more than separate itself from error by a sparing use of the spiritual penalty of excommunication.² Corporal punishment for spiritual offences crept into the thought and practice of the Church in consequence of the lust for power and by a crude confusion of criminal and spiritual offences.³

This is not to argue that the Church must tolerate all heresy and error; rather it orients the Church anew on the solid foundations of its true strength. Such a view rests upon the firm persuasion that sound preaching and purity of doctrine form the sole and omnicompetent weapon of the Church.⁴ Such a spiritual conception enjoins the clergy to "use no violence to any man, to bring him to your opinion; but by the word of your proper ministry, by demonstrations of the spirit, by rational discourses, by excellent examples, constrain them to come in."⁵ When the Church proceeds within the limits imposed by this philosophy against what it conceives to be heresy, it incurs no risk of persecuting a truth which it fallibly denominates error; it submits all questions of doubt to the free arena of discussion and solution. At the same time, it enjoys an

¹ Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, I, 334.

² Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 525.

³ "As men had ends of their own and not of Christ's, as they receded from their duty and religion from its purity, as Christianity began to be compounded with interests and blended with temporal designs, so men were persecuted for their opinions." (Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 528.)

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 531.

⁵ Taylor, Jeremy, *Rules and advices to the clergy of . . . Down and Connor*, etc. (Dublin, 1661), in *Works*, I, 104.

inherent right to safeguard the purity and integrity of its own spiritual constitution. Such a Church cannot be accused of intolerance when it cleanses itself by the spiritual penalty of excommunication in order to preserve piety and maintain a holy life. But when any church goes farther "she becomes tyrannical in her government, makes herself an immediate judge of consciences and persuasions, lords it over their faith, [and] destroys unity and charity."¹ Those who err are to be dealt with gently and tenderly by the Church which must rest content in the conviction that God reveals His truth to men in His own time and manner.²

The disastrous effects which rigorous courses have wrought in religion have been abundantly demonstrated, Taylor submitted, in the history and philosophy of the Roman Church. Rome has so confused and distorted the spiritual nature of religion that she has come to regard propriety of belief as more important than vitality of faith. She has bound men in a narrow and inflexible formulation of belief and worship which has been brutally imposed upon conscience through sheer terror.³ Rome cannot escape the charge that she added her own glosses to the fundamentals of faith and then imposed her additions upon the consciences of Christian men and women.⁴ The Catholics, Taylor maintained, have fallen into an error common to all enthusiasts in that they have added to the simple essentials enjoined by the scriptures "an inward word, which being only within, is subject to no discipline, reducible into no order." They have created a religion which "wanders from day to day, from fancy to fancy . . . alterable by every new illusion."⁵ This Church has arrogated to itself infallible pretensions which invade the sovereignty which God alone possesses over the human soul and which belie that divine mercy upon which the hope of our salvation rests.⁶

Thus all pretensions to ecclesiastical authority rest funda-

¹ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 533.

² Taylor, *Rules and advices to the clergy*, Works, I, 105.

³ Taylor, *Dissuasive from popery*, Works, VI, 476.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Works, VI, 380.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Works, VI, 386.

⁶ Taylor, Jeremy, *Five letters to persons changed or tempted to a change in their religion* (L., c.1657), in Works, VI, 656-657.

mentally upon false assumptions concerning infallibility and upon irreligious coercive practices. The effect of the teaching of an exclusive religious authority has been at once to destroy the spiritual nature of truth and gravely to disturb the structure of human society. Religion has become the tool of ambitious and predatory men who have warped and perverted it to their own impious purposes. Many crimes and many tragedies have flowed from the disposition of men to rule with precision in matters that are obscure; to order with an intolerant presumption in areas that must forever remain cloudy and uncertain to the human mind. But beyond question, Taylor strongly asserted, the most vicious of all these consequences has been the theory and practice of religious persecution.

Taylor's analysis of the psychological roots of religious persecution follows closely the outlines of the classical treatment which Acontius had given to the subject two generations earlier. Intolerance proceeds principally from fear; persecution is the instrument wherewith uncertain and frightened men bolster positions which they subjectively realize are unsound. In religion, as in all other matters, the rich versatility of the human genius inevitably produces a variety of opinions. Unhappily, men connect the veracity of their opinions too closely with their own honour and integrity. Thus we assume that the opinions which we entertain are not only true but profitable. Moreover, by simple logical extension we come to assume that such opinions are necessary. Hence we divide all men into two categories: those whom we love because they agree with us, and those whom we hate because they decline to lend credence to our persuasion. We are moved insensibly from the secret wish that evil should overtake those who differ from us to the final persuasion that it is just that they should be destroyed. In these dark and dismal recesses of the human mind the persecuting spirit has been spawned. When the dread spirit of persecution masters us "passion reigns, and reason is modest and patient, and talks not loud like a storm, victory is more regarded than truth, and men call God into the party, and His judgments are used for arguments, and the threatenings of the scripture are snatched up in haste, and men throw arrows,

fire-brands, and death" to accomplish the ruin of religion and the destruction of the civil society.¹

The psychology of persecution, then, deeply rooted in the carnal man, is foreign to the nature of the truly religious man. During the ages of apostolic purity it was unknown in a Church beset by the most ruinous and devouring heresies. Persecution crept in later as the weapon of men who desired to exalt their own infamous designs in the name of Christ. So virulent has been this pervasive poison that the entire body of Christendom has been infected. The true weapons of spiritual warfare have been abandoned for the sword of force, despite the patent fact that it is entirely useless against opinion and conscience.² The hideous uproar and the intolerant spirit which have been engendered have all but obscured Christ's injunction that we must win men by persuasion and regard tolerantly the differences which separate us.³ Peace in the world and spiritual strength in the Church can only be restored by the renunciation of this vicious evil which has so grievously infected Christendom. "Let not men be hasty," Taylor warned, "in calling every disliked opinion by the name of heresy; and when they have resolved that they will call it so, let them use the erring person like a brother, not beat him like a dog, or convince him with a gibbet."⁴

The rigid and infallible claims of the persecuting churches have not only undermined the faith of simple men and women but have made Christianity itself ridiculous. There are perhaps five hundred sects in the world each claiming to be the sole church, each claiming a monopoly upon the truth of Christ. These sects have in effect said that the probability "is five hundred to one but that every man is damned; for every sect damns all but itself . . . and is damned of four hundred and ninety-nine."⁵ Men are confused and lost in this harsh medley of clashing bigotries and persecuting pretensions. Every sect desires to impose its particular brand of truth upon all others, but arms itself with a blind obstinacy against any truth that other men may have gained.⁶

¹ Taylor, *Dissuasive from popery*, Works, VI, 478.

² Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 354.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 344. ⁴ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 354.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 355.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 345.

The cancerous fibres of the persecuting philosophy have penetrated deep into the body of religion. Even when more enlightened men and sects disown the barbarous disposition to punish heresy by corporal pains they do not necessarily repudiate a harshness of temper which may bear upon other men with all the weight of persecution. Those who blacken the reputation of their opponents, those who burn their books, or distort their views, likewise clearly exhibit the cruel visage of the persecutor.¹ Such men profess at best a negative Christianity which busies itself with trifles and which defends the hard and infertile kernels of dogma, but these men do not live or conduct themselves as Christians. With a daring unorthodoxy that would have been dangerous a few decades earlier, Taylor demanded to know "how many volumes have been writ about angels, about immaculate conception, about original sin, when that all that is solid reason or clear revelation in all these three articles may be reasonably enough comprised in forty lines."² The Christian world will gain no peace and will attain no unity until it binds itself to those impregnable fundamentals which all sects accept, leaving every man absolutely free to discover truth for himself and to enlarge the bounds of his knowledge so far as reason and divine guidance will assist.³

e. The problem of heresy and error

Few writers during the revolutionary era lent such careful and thorough consideration to the problem of religious error as did Jeremy Taylor. It must be recalled that he wrote in a period when eccentric and incendiary sects were springing up almost daily, in an age when the very fabric of institutional religion and the very structure of orthodox dogma appeared to be in process of rapid deterioration. Taylor was a devout Anglican who was grievously troubled and sickened by the process of disintegration which appeared to be gathering such overwhelming momentum. The peculiar virtue and the philosophical strength of his tolerance are discovered in the fact that these revolutionary tendencies in religious development in England

¹ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 357-358.

² *Ibid.*, Works, V, 361-362.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 357.

were not able to destroy the fine balance of his mind, to distort the clarity of his vision, or impair the quality of his tolerance.

Taylor makes a very precise distinction between religious error and heresy. Error he defined as a false opinion on a point of dogma or belief not essential to salvation, heresy as an opinion wilfully held which contravenes a fundamental tenet of Christian faith. Since Taylor defined the fundamentals with great tolerance,¹ it should be borne in mind that that which he denominated error, orthodox thought in his age defined as heretical; and that that which he regarded as heresy, normal seventeenth-century opinion usually dignified by the addition of the adjective "hideous." Most error, Taylor submitted, is both innocent and harmless. The honest man, he suggested in the *Ductor dubitantium*, "though he be in darkness . . . will find his way out, or grope his way within; he shall be guided or he shall be pardoned."² Error can be regarded as nothing else than an imperfect condition of belief in process of refinement, which, since it is purely subjective, we can neither analyse nor remedy by external pressure.³ Error is absorbed during the subtle process of our education or from our environment, and hence can be eradicated only as we mature in our knowledge and understanding. Taylor was, it is evident, deeply persuaded that most men do not arrive at belief by an act of reason but rather accept the "principles which they are first taught, which they sucked in next to their milk. . . . For whatsoever is taught to them at first they believe infinitely."⁴ It is inevitable, therefore, that truth will always be apprehended somewhat imperfectly and will be expressed in a variety of ways. When this fact is generally understood, men will not urge their subjective views with such imperious zeal, and they will, in order to preserve the substance of their own liberty, scrupulously refrain from any effort to impose their opinions upon others.⁵

Hence the Christian Church had as well accommodate itself, and that quickly, to the fact that error will ever flourish in the vast sphere of speculative and unessential truth. But it does no

¹ *Vide post*, 398-403.

² The view here should be compared with that expressed in *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 397.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 511-512.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 503.

⁵ *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 500-502.

harm whatsoever either to truth or to the unity of faith. Religious errors, since they are absorbed from our environment, are strongly rooted in human nature. Even arguments, and certainly force, are not sufficiently strong "to overmaster an habitual persuasion bred with a man, nourished up with him, that always eat at his table, and lay in his bosom."¹ But such a man is neither involved in heresy nor in danger of damnation so long as he cleaves to the simple essentials of Christian faith. When he is dealt with gently, when he is permitted freely and patiently to search for truth, when the slender plant of his faith is permitted to grow naturally and slowly, he will in his own maturity cast off the errors that have limited the largeness of his vision. The church must, in fine, tolerate error in order to vanquish it; it must tolerate error in order to achieve the good life without which its truths are but the empty profession of lips that are cold with the chill of spiritual death.

Overt heresy, however, though very rare, is a serious matter which must be carefully considered. Taylor repeatedly defines it as obstinate error in a fundamental of faith, and he was greatly troubled by the problems which heresy, thus tolerantly regarded, imposes upon the Christian society. It is evident at many points in his argument that in individual cases of heresy he would not proceed beyond the spiritual penalty of excommunication. It is equally apparent that he arrived at no clear solution of the problem raised when heresy, as he defines it, crystallizes into a sect which wars upon the fundamental Christian truths. The problem posed here has nothing more than theoretical importance for Taylor since he admitted all of the sects of England within the broad frame of his fundamentals, but it may be surmised that the Anglican divine feared that out of the fevered religious eccentricity of his age sects might be spawned which would precipitate the issue as a practical problem of religious policy. Taylor considered the question fully and honestly, but neither his great tolerance nor his ready pragmatism provided an answer to a fundamental problem which, in another guise, harasses liberal commonwealths in a later historical epoch.

Heresy, Taylor argued, means nothing else than a great

¹ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 504.

error in *materia pietatis*—a teaching rejecting or denying Christ.¹ Furthermore, it is most important to realize that heresy involves an act of the will, not of the understanding, since no man can or should relinquish an opinion to which he is persuaded in reason. Taylor almost reduces the compass of heresy to the improbable circumstance of deliberate and wilful devotion to a fundamental error. To argue otherwise, indeed, is to hold the untenable opinion “that some men shall be damned when they cannot help it, perish without their own fault . . . through their own simplicity and natural or accidental, but inculpable infirmity.”² Even obstinacy cannot of itself transform error into heresy, since the convinced mind must as part of its very integrity cling resolutely to its persuasion. Hence when a man errs even in a fundamental he may not “be judged a heretic because he submits not his understanding; because till it be sufficiently made certain to him that he is bound to submit, he may innocently and piously disagree.”³ Moreover, it cannot be argued that the most stubborn man will not yield his understanding when God’s truth is certainly made known to him.

As in the case of his discussion of the problem of authority, the sweep of Taylor’s rhetoric and logic had led him with an irresistible gravity to destroy the premise which he had so carefully stated. Taylor in effect lends heresy definition and then by ever-narrowing circles of reasoning consumes the substance of his definition. We understand him to mean in the last analysis that heresy can involve nothing else than an error in the fundamentals, deliberately held despite the tuition of reason and the persuasion of God Himself. Such a conception limits heresy very narrowly indeed; or rather it may be said to define heresy as insanity.

In a long historical discussion of the problem of heresy Taylor seems to conclude that according to his own tolerant definition the Church may employ none other than spiritual weapons against undisputed heresy. This was without question the attitude of the apostles. The Christian Church derived its historical position on heresy not from the apostles but from

¹ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 378.

² *Ibid.*, V, 384.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 387.

distorted and venomous catalogues of errors compiled by private men in the third and fourth centuries of the Christian era.¹ The early Councils proceeded tolerantly in this matter and were extremely circumspect in their doctrinal formulations, little realizing that their decisions would later be magnified and distorted into a system of ruinous persecution. An ever expanding spiritual tyranny developed, not unlike an arbitrary civil authority which at first takes sixpence from the subject, then a thousand pounds, and then all.² Thus Taylor would hold that even the condemnation of the Arians as heretics exceeded the bounds of tolerance and ruled with infallible certitude on a matter which yet remains mysterious and uncertain. This insupportable action established a dire precedent by which less pious and noble men were able to destroy the substance of Christian liberty. From this illiberal and insupportable view of heresy, from a mistaken notion of the means by which its cure may be attained, dissension, bitterness, and bloodshed have sprung to engulf the Christian world. Truly it may be said that Christianity has been destroyed in the feverish pursuit of imaginary heresies.

f. The fundamentals of faith and the comprehensive ideal

Taylor had demonstrated with great care that Christianity had been divided into innumerable creedal fragments, each hardening into sterile coagulations under the destructive delusion of infallibility. These fragments, instead of expanding under the warm light of God's truth, are visibly contracting as fear and intolerance draw the line of definition tighter. And, most tragically, these imperfect particles of Christianity have long been engaged in a cruel and disastrous war upon each other in which charity, moderation, and all sense of proportion have perished. Taylor, like the Latitudinarians, condemned this intolerant rigidity and this persecuting strife as fratricidal and criminal. He pointed out the hideous fact that men who made a common profession of Christ waged war upon each other in the name of Christ. The Christian world, he lamented, seems bent with a demoniacal zeal upon a kind of mass suicide.

¹ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 392-395. ² *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 404.

Christianity and the civil society as well could be saved, he was deeply persuaded, only by calm reflection upon the nature of religion and by a careful examination of the fundamental principles upon which Christianity rests. Taylor brought into clear focus the view, which tolerant writers from the time of Acontius had urged, that Christianity must be reduced to its minimum essentials, that the lowest common denominator of faith must be found. He took the almost irrefutable position that the fundamental verities are simple and are clearly revealed. These self-evident truths gave the Church its origin and significance in much the sense that law precedes, rather than springs from, the state.¹ Not only are these fundamentals professed by all the Christian communions, but it may be held that no doctrine can be regarded as fundamental unless it is professed by all the Christian groups. Consequently the variety of faith and worship manifest in the Christian world proceeds rather from secondary sources related to education, environment, and natural character than from religion itself. The Christian Churches are in fact joined in a true unity of the spirit which transcends their superficial variations. It therefore follows that animosity, condemnation, and persecution, whether between or within churches, must be regarded as impious, vicious, and unchristian. This position, a rational accommodation to the endless and destructive religious conflicts that followed the Reformation, is of very great importance in the development of religious toleration.

Taylor confessed that he was constrained, both by the search for unity and by the desire to cure the intolerance which was destroying the very substance of religion, to reduce the complex structure of Christian doctrine to its essential elements. Almost every sect "propounds to you a system or collective body of articles, and tells you, that's the true religion, and they are the Church, and the peculiar people of God."² Hence the body of Christianity has been broken into numberless and mutually hostile fragments which seek to gird their pitiful weakness by exclusive and infallible claims. Each sect has

¹ Freund, *Die Idee der Toleranz*, 43-44.

² Taylor, Jeremy, *Via intelligentiæ. A sermon preached to the University of Dublin, etc.* (L., 1660), in *Works*, VIII, 364.

unconsciously added its peculiar and inconsequential gloss to the essential body of faith in order to vindicate its peculiarity.¹ The first task, therefore, in the great work of restoring unity and charity, is rigorously to separate the beliefs necessary to salvation from those which febrile imagination and outright intolerance have contrived.² Wise and tolerant men must dedicate themselves to the reconciliation of the differences of Christendom by counsels of moderation and by insistent emphasis upon those essentials of faith which all sects profess.³ If their efforts fail, harsh political necessity will impose an absolute toleration upon the warring sects which will ruthlessly damp down the flames of consuming ardour.

An urgent compulsion therefore is laid against all the Christian sects to define clearly those essentials which are necessary for our salvation.⁴ We have in this search for spiritual unity and moderation of temper a clear and infallible guide. For it is evident that in the purity of its early constitution the Christian faith was "the most simple and wise thing in the world; it was wholly an art of living well, and believing in God through Jesus Christ."⁵ The foundations of that strong and living faith are as simple as they are sharply clear. "All that which is the necessary parts, means, or main actions . . . is in the bowels and fold of the great article" that Jesus is our Redeemer.⁶ Christ imposed no other restriction upon faith than this simple belief and no man and no church dare make the way to heaven narrower. Faith, it must be understood, is not an institutional organization directed by discipline towards the attainment of certain doctrinal ends, but is simply an acceptance by the individual man of the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice.

The apostles foresaw that the beautiful simplicity of their faith was to be spun out into endless and destructive complexities and in order to preserve the very substance of Christianity summarized the essentials of faith in clear and precise terms. God Himself was pleased "to descant upon the plain ground, as to make the mystery of godliness to be clearly under-

¹ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 348.

² *Ibid.*, Works, V, 345.

³ Taylor, *Via intelligentiæ*, Works, VIII, 365.

⁴ Taylor, *Dissuasive from popery*, Works, VI, 435.

⁵ Taylor, *Ductor dubitantium*, Works, IX, 644.

⁶ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 369.

stood by all men.”¹ The Apostles’ Creed was able in those purer days to bring men to salvation and surely we are lost unless it retains its efficacy in these later ages. This much and no more has the Christian Church demanded of its members.² This creed is simple, completely clear, and entirely competent for our salvation.³ This is the impregnable rock of our faith which no man, no council, and no church can possibly enlarge or modify without warring on Christ. This is the charter of our Christian liberty and the sole badge of our profession of faith.

It is evident, then, that all men who believe in Christ as the saviour of the world are faithful members of the Christian Church. “A man may be saved without knowing any thing else . . . without enquiring after any thing, without believing any thing else, provided that in this faith he live a good life.”⁴ The Christian or the church that adds to this essential of belief stands convicted of intolerance and the sect that limits its charity by additional prescriptions of faith is guilty of persecution and schism.⁵ Taylor brought this terrible indictment against every church of his own age and against every formulation of doctrine that had been reared to confine the vast expanse of Christian community. Even the Nicene Creed was too narrowly drawn and the orthodox doctrine of the trinity too “nicely and sharply” defined.⁶ Men have added their slow accretions to the fundamentals of faith with the cumulative result that purity of belief and moderation of temper have been quite destroyed. Men worship sects, not truth; men labour earnestly for propriety of opinions, not for vitality of faith. The unhappy consequence has been that “every man seems confident, but few men have reason; and there is no rest, and there can be none, but in this simplicity of belief which the apostles recommended to all the world, and which all the world does still keep in despite of all their superinduced opinions and

¹ Taylor, *Dissuasive from popery*, Works, VI, 436–437.

² Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 373; Taylor, *Dissuasive from popery*, Works, VI, 437.

³ Taylor, *Ductor dubitantium*, Works, IX, 645; Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 373–374.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Works, IX, 652.

⁵ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 603.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 399–400.

factions; for they all retain this creed, and they all believe it to be the summary of faith."¹ Taylor had sketched with clear precision a statement of comprehension which brought every religious communion of his age securely within the compass of Christian unity. He warmly insisted that the Church, which had for so long narrowed the limits of its constitution with disastrous consequences, must define as broadly and tolerantly as possible the outer limits of its creed and communion. He posed a conception of Christianity, to which most of England was already half persuaded, which cured the plague of intolerance and persecution by the calm insistence that the warring sects were in reality bound in unity of faith. Taylor submitted that persecution was at once irrational and criminal. Men must come to regard themselves as common members of a Church which is as broad as Christianity itself, as spiritually joined in a Church which rises above the petty formulae and the historical eccentricities of the particular communion in which chance has placed them. For the Church of Christ binds men in unity of spirit and instils in them that moderation of temper which will ever be the mark of the Christian man.

Taylor pleaded, in fine, for a larger and nobler conception of Christian unity. The individual differences which race, nationality, education, and environment impose have no more connection with unity of faith than do linguistic differences with unity of thought. These matters, these institutional variations are but accidents which bear no relation whatsoever to the sources of our faith. These differences are at once inevitable and salutary, but they must be properly understood in their relation to the common root of faith from which they spring in such luxuriant profusion. Peace and true unity may be attained only by joining the Church firmly to the fundamentals of faith and by granting to all men and to all sects complete liberty to think and worship as they choose.² "I am much persuaded," Taylor earnestly wrote, that "we shall find out more truths by this means; or . . . which is the main of all, we shall be secured though we miss them."³ Thus it is that true unity will be

¹ Taylor, *Ductor dubitantium*, Works, IX, 653-654, et cf. *ibid.*, Works, X, 442.

² Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 366-367.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 367.

attained in liberty, that the divisions which now harass the minds of men of little vision will come to implement a larger and a nobler conception of the faith of Christ. The counsels of moderation and tolerance beckon men towards a new and richer life and stand ready to guide the Christian world from the impenetrable wilderness into which intolerance and persecution have lured it towards destruction.

g. The question of toleration

As so frequently happens in Taylor's thought, his logic had brought him to a position which his institutional instinct could not fully accept. If we may speak without certain evidence, Taylor had been moved to admit the necessity of toleration but not to admit its philosophical virtue. There is, it should be indicated, no contradiction in his thought, nor can it be maintained that Taylor withdrew after the Restoration the vast commitment which he had made to toleration during the generation of revolution. The Anglican divine was principally interested in enlarging the limits of comprehension, not in erecting a system of necessary toleration outside a narrowly and inflexibly defined Establishment. Thus it may be held that he proposed to secure a large tolerance by a positive action which in his judgment Christian moderation required; he was only slightly interested in that legal toleration which, admittedly, the warring bigotry of rival sects may require society to impose for its own protection. Taylor sought to escape the Erastian solution for the seventeenth-century dilemma by summoning the Church to a moderate course which would make the political solution unnecessary. He endeavoured to derive tolerance from the structure of religion itself, to effect the cure before the heavy hand of the state found it necessary to destroy persecution and, unhappily, institutional vitality as well.

It should likewise be recalled that Taylor's definition of heresy was so broad and tolerant as practically to deny the necessity of persecution under any circumstance. Though he did not accept the principles of religious toleration without reservation, he so limited the potential sphere of intolerance as to exclude it from the realm of any but theoretical discussion.

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

We shall see that he regarded certain modes of worship and certain ecclesiastical conceptions as politically dangerous and hence as raising grave problems in political theory, but he was warmly consistent in his conviction that belief must remain free. Taylor remained a Latitudinarian, and one of rare and rich catholicity of vision. And Latitudinarianism, it must again be insisted, has its own peculiar content of tolerance quite aside from the essentially political solution which history ordained should ultimately be embraced by men interested rather in political and social strength and stability than in the vitality which may flow from a broad and moderate conception of Christianity.¹

Taylor felt his way with a disarming candour towards a judgment on the question of absolute toleration. It is evident, he submitted, and the whole weight of his thought supported him here, that religious belief may not be persecuted. If, however, a religious opinion inspires a criminal action, the opinion cannot be argued in extenuation, since a crime involves a legally demonstrable fact in its very nature dangerous to the civil society.² But the sphere of punishment for religious causes must be very limited indeed since the passage of time and the steady accumulation of opinions and beliefs have made it quite impossible certainly to determine even outright heresy. Thus if we kill a man for heresy he is certainly killed, but "if he be called heretic, it is not so certain that he is a heretic."³ Persecution and rigorous courses have ever flowed from error and have been scrupulously avoided by the true Church. The Church is further restrained from persecution by the fact that intolerant courses surrender the ultimate determination of religious truth to brutal force and make the Church the plaything of political chance.⁴ No prudent man and certainly no

¹ For other and somewhat divergent views on the structure of Taylor's tolerance, *vide* Dowden, Edward, *Puritan and Anglican: Studies in Literature* (N.Y., 1910), 207-211; Freund, *Die Idee der Toleranz*, 53-56; Gosse, *Jeremy Taylor*, 46-47; and Hallam, *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, II, 433.

² Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 514-515.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 517.

⁴ Hence there has developed a "perpetual butchery; and as fast as men's wits grow wanton, or confident, or proud, or abused, so often there will be new executions and massacres." It is infinitely better to spare men who are

true Church would ever incur the awful risk of ruling infallibly on a question of religious truth. We possess no capacity for comprehending truth fully and we dare not submit the hope of our salvation to fallible criteria posed and enforced by man.¹ The Church must not make the way to heaven narrower than Christ has prescribed, and it must accept as true Christians all those who profess belief in Him.² The Christian is therefore far more concerned with perfecting the purity of his own faith and with refining the moderation of his own temper than with waging quixotic war on the errors which God in His wisdom has chosen to tolerate.

We are consequently driven to the view that all those who adhere to the fundamentals of faith must be freely tolerated so long as they lead a good and pious life which does not bring them into conflict with civil law. We may conclude that "it concerns all persons to see that they do their best to find out truth; and if they do, it is certain that let the error be never so damnable, they shall escape the error or the misery of being damned for it. And if God will not be angry at men for being invincibly deceived, why should men be angry one at another?"³ Error does no man harm so long as his spirit is free and his search for truth persistent.⁴ Heresy becomes toxic in the body of Christianity only when it is hardened by persecutions and ennobled by martyrdoms. The zealous should reflect that "there is a popular pity that follows all persons in misery, and that compassion breeds likeness of affections, and that very often produces likeness of persuasion; and so much the rather, because there arises a jealousy and pregnant suspicion that they who persecute an opinion are destitute of sufficient arguments to confute it."⁵

It would seem evident, therefore, that both Christianity and natural reason incline our feet to the path of toleration. So long as our own reason is sound and clear we will employ it alone in the persuasion of those who differ from us. Force can lend no support to religion, and its employment may

lost in error than that "upon the turn of the wheel the true believers should be destroyed." (Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 518.)

¹ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 519.

² *Ibid.*, Works, V, 601.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 604.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 520.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 521.

work very grievous harm indeed in the structure of faith. The Christian faith must be propagated by those spiritual agencies which served Christ and His apostles with such remarkable success. We may say, in fact, that it is "one of the glories of Christian religion that it was so pious, excellent, miraculous, and persuasive, that it came in upon its own piety and wisdom, with no other force but a torrent of arguments and demonstration of the Spirit." It alone of all the religions of mankind vindicated the principle that tolerance and charity are the most effective arms of truth.¹ Tolerance, quite as much as piety and an upright life, must be regarded as the inevitable hall-mark of the Christian man.

But, as we have indicated, Taylor did not either in the *Liberty of Prophesying* or in his later works espouse the cause of complete legal toleration. He infinitely preferred that the same end should be accomplished by the spiritual remedy of a more comprehensive and charitable definition of the limits of the Church. He very nearly says that he fears to submit liberty to the brawling lust of sects which prate of toleration while aiming at mastery. His opinion of human nature was low and his judgment of the temper of his century was even lower. Toleration, he suggested, assumes far greater reasonableness and charity than in fact exist. Too many sects argue with rigid and intolerant arrogance that their particular definition of truth is necessary for all men. They "preach for toleration when themselves are under the rod," but directly they have gained mastery discover toleration to be quite intolerable.² The zeal of such intolerant spirits is incredibly dangerous to human society because it flows from an intense moral conviction that the exclusive triumph of a particular set of doctrinal principles is necessary for the salvation of mankind.³ Hence the neutrality of the state would endanger all men by exposing them to a religious struggle of intense ferocity, while the imposition of the crushing weight of political toleration would endanger the vitality of religion itself. Certainly it may be held that the better and more tolerant

¹ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, *Works*, V, 523-524.

² Taylor, *Via intelligentiæ*, *Works*, VIII, 366.

³ *Ibid.*, *Works*, VIII, 366-367.

solution is to be found in the Latitudinarian ideal of comprehension. The state should seek to enlarge the circumference of the Church to its outermost extent, carefully guarding the structure of society by reasonable limitations upon those rebellious actions which invade either civil sovereignty or moral unity.

We may say, therefore, that the Church is by its very nature tolerant of dissent as well as error. The question of toleration consequently becomes an issue which concerns the civil state far more vitally than it does the Church. Thus a sound Christian may express his opinions with such fanatical intensity as to endanger the public peace and hence fall properly under the civil penalty of the state. The ruler has no more right than any other mortal to punish heresy, but as a sovereign he must repress those actions which, though they rise out of a burning faith, have criminal rather than religious content.¹ There was here a real distinction which, if not wholly clear in Taylor's mind, is no less confused in contemporary political theory. Taylor had striven manfully to define and defend as large an area as possible in which the human spirit could roam untrammelled in its search for truth. But as a conservative and as a realist he remained conscious of the fact that if institutions are to survive they must impose upon men certain responsibilities as the fee of liberty. Taylor sought to frame the structure of a Christian society which would include within its generous confines all reasonable and moderate men. There would remain on the periphery radical and irreconcilable spirits who, in the pursuit of special aims and arrogant pretensions, would not be reconciled to the generous tolerance which moderation had fabricated. The great Anglican moderate addressed himself with frankness and energy to the problems with which Cromwell had wrestled with such remarkable charity of intention, and, it should be pointed out, Taylor's decision in theory was not dissimilar to that which the Protector had attained in administrative practice.

The moderate ideal, Taylor urged, was attacked by radicalism on the left and by dangerous reaction on the right. Employing the term Anabaptist in the generic sense in which

¹ Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying, Works*, V, 533-536.

his generation used it to the improper inclusion of the violent incendiaries who so grievously troubled the Protectorate,¹ Taylor concluded that these groups taught no religious doctrine involving them in the charge of heresy.² They are consequently not to be repressed on that score, and the magistrate must be punctilious in preserving their religious liberty. But these men preach vicious civil doctrines as well that are contrary, not to the fundamentals of faith, but to the fundamentals of good government, and this no sovereign power can tolerate.³ Similarly, the Roman Catholics raise a question in politics rather than in religion. Taylor pays full tribute to the antiquity and the noble achievements of the Catholic Church and indicates that it adheres firmly to the fundamentals of faith.⁴ Hence no religious question is involved in its toleration. But, unhappily, the Church has set itself in a relentless war against those states that do not impose its tenets, and has armed itself with opinions which are "a direct overthrow to all human society and mutual commerce, a destruction of government, and of the laws."⁵ These seditious opinions offer no threat to sovereignty so long as they are intellectually or spiritually entertained, but directly they implement and inspire treason the civil government must act vigorously for the protection of its own integrity.

Taylor here poses a solution to the troubled question of dissent which England had come to accept as axiomatic by the time of the Restoration. The case of religious toleration had been ceded and the sturdily rooted pretension of exclusive truth had been completely repudiated. Toleration was in Taylor's view both desirable and necessary for the pursuit of an orderly and decent religious life. His careful logic had explored and had shattered every resource of reason and authority which might be adduced in support of religious coercion, whether its aim was the preservation of an organic ideal of religious life or the maintenance of institutional

¹ Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 147-148, 174-176.

² We here reduce a long argument, Taylor, *Liberty of prophesying*, Works, V, 559-589.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 589-591.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 591-593.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Works, V, 595; Taylor, Jeremy, *A sermon preached in . . . Oxford, upon the anniversary of the Gunpowder-treason* (L., 1638), in Works, VIII, 471.

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religion. Taylor's own doubts and uncertainties were overcome by the weight and discrimination of his own reason. He carefully indicated that extremist positions which threaten an ordered society must be repressed in the interests of the larger whole, and in so far as either a philosopher or a political theorist can do so he separated with deft and charitable fingers the stuff of sedition from the unfathomable content of faith.

Taylor raised the moderate ideal, which greater minds in an earlier generation had formulated, to a larger and more realistic sphere of discussion and observation. He dwelt amongst men rather than upon the mountain-top of speculation; his honest and enquiring mind sought constantly for a solution to the religious quarrel which had broken the culture and polity of the western world—a solution which would at once restore the vitality of Christian life and maintain the integrity of the state. He advanced a definition of Anglicanism which, while rooted in the theory of the great Elizabethan founders of the Church, adapted that noble conception to an age which was pregnant with more pressing problems and torn by wider gulfs of difference. The peculiar strength and quality of his moderation is to be found in the fact that he framed the magnificent architecture of his conception in an age when the Church which he loved lay in ruins. The passion and acid hatred which sullied religion in his day were powerless to poison the moderation and magnanimity of his thought. The solution which he advanced and the tolerance which he and his moderate colleagues supported were competent to effect the cure which a weary and wounded England required. It was the inevitable tragedy of history that the restoration of the Church of England was to be accomplished by men who, since they had suffered less, hated more.

4. JOHN BRAMHALL, 1594-1663

John Bramhall was another of the distinguished group of Anglican divines that learned the lessons of moderation and discovered a richer and larger tolerance during the disruptive decades of revolutionary change. Bramhall, a native of Cheshire, was educated at Cambridge. Taking orders in 1616, he began

his ministry in Yorkshire, where he gained a considerable reputation as a redoubtable foe of Catholicism. Resigning his charge in 1633 in order to accompany Wentworth to Ireland as a chaplain, he was designated Bishop of Derry in the following year. During the next several years Bramhall displayed remarkable talents as an administrator, though he was unquestionably harsh and repressive in his dealings with the strong and vocal Calvinistic element in his diocese. Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War he was impeached and was imprisoned for a short time pending the outcome of the charges that had been laid against him. Bramhall was able to flee abroad in 1644 and during the remainder of the revolutionary era was regarded as a strong supporter of the royalist cause.

Actually, however, Bramhall's thought underwent steady moderation during the period of his exile and by the time of the Restoration he had arrived at a comprehensive ideal of the Church of England which marked him as a leader of the liberal Anglican party. Bramhall was named Archbishop of Armagh in 1661 and in the season of royalist triumph administered his charge and elaborated his moderate views with a conciliatory temper that stands in the sharpest contrast to his earlier policy and thought. He discoursed constantly "with great moderation and sobriety of the convenience of having the articles of peace and communion in every National Church worded in that latitude, that dissenting persons in these things that concern'd not the Christian faith, might subscribe, and the Church not lose the benefit of their labours, for an opinion, which it may be they could not help." Thus Bramhall endeavoured by broadening the conception of the Church to bring the conservative elements of Protestant dissent within the confines of the Establishment and laboured earnestly to repair the grave damage which inordinate zeal and partisan rigours had wrought on the body of the Church.

Above all, Bramhall had learned that the Church had been divided and destroyed by an intolerant insistence upon doctrines and points of view related neither to salvation nor to Christian unity. Immoderation and intolerance, he maintained, have inflamed the temper and have despoiled the charity of Christianity. Directly men examine their differences with their

emphasis firmly laid upon the essentials of faith, the partisan issues which divide them are speedily resolved. Controversial bitterness is kept alive by "some blunderers, who follow the old mode when the fashion is grown out of date, either out of prejudice, or pride, or want of judgment."¹ Pride and arrogant ambition have been responsible for the elevation of opinions to the dignity of doctrine and have engendered an intolerant conception of heresy from which have been derived all the persecutions and the bloody religious conflicts that have disgraced the fair name of Christianity.

The Church of England, Bramhall warmly insisted, must establish itself upon lofty and tolerant foundations that rise high above the petty clash of rival bigotries. It must carefully define itself as Christian and gladly abandon all pretences to infallible knowledge and exclusive authority which are in reality marks of sectarian weakness and fear. This Church, Bramhall wrote at the moment of the royalist triumph, must seek to embrace all that is Christian in English life. It must gladly admit all Christians "who do profess the apostolical creed as it is expounded by the first four general Councils under the primitive discipline; and the Roman Catholic also, if they did not make their errors to be a condition of their communion."² Only then will the Church be truly Catholic; only then will it possess those qualities of tolerance and moderation which are the marks of the true Church of Christ.

In particular, the Church must proceed with great circumspection and tolerance in its definition and treatment of heresy.³ Our own beliefs are dear to us, and we tend to invest them with a sacrosanct character derived not from their validity but from our zeal. Hence we condemn as erroneous those who disagree with us, when we mean in reality that they differ in their opinions. Whatever rationalizations men and churches have been able to advance, this has been the brutal inspiration

¹ Bramhall, John, *Works, etc.* (Oxford, 1842-1845), III, 571. Bramhall's writings are very difficult to date accurately, since most of them were published posthumously. Most of the items cited, it seems probable, were written between 1648 and 1662.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 564.

³ Bramhall draws the usual distinction between formal and material heresy, *Works*, II, 584-586.

of Christian procedure against what has been loosely denominated heresy. The fact is that very often "seeming different opinions are both true, and all the opposition is but a contention about words, and then mutual censures are vain; sometimes they are both false, and then there is more use of mutual charity than mutual censures." In any case we should ever reflect that an error against charity is infinitely more reprehensible than a mere error of judgment.¹ The Church should content itself with a generous and tolerant definition of faith that includes nothing save those foundations of Christian belief which are transcendently clear and which all Christian Churches accept.² Even the Catholics must be included within the frame of this conception, since they are seised with the saving essentials of faith.³ Thus the area of our intolerance will be extinguished and the Church may at last concentrate her energies upon that spiritual mission which offers salvation to mankind and peace to the world.

We must, therefore, regard ourselves as joined in spiritual unity with all Christian men of whatever creed and sect. For there is a larger unity, a universal Christianity, which transcends the accidental lines of national and sectarian churches. This larger Church gains its unity in the "saving necessary truths" upon which all men are agreed in faith and belief. None may be excluded from that communion, none may be denied the hope of salvation who profess the apostolic creed and who labour earnestly after a larger knowledge of truth.⁴ Furthermore, persecution and bigoted strife within this large circumference of catholicity can be regarded as nothing else than bestial and destructive. Persecution belies the very nature of Christianity and shatters the slender yet sufficient bonds of unity. Intolerance lays a blind and impious emphasis upon differences which are external and insignificant—differences which do not separate men in their devotion to truth and in their worship of the same God.⁵

The Church of England enjoys a special character and a particular constitution based upon the peculiar needs and habits of a people. But it, like other churches, is at the same

¹ Bramhall, *Works*, II, 586–587.

² *Ibid.*, II, 206.

³ *Ibid.*, II, 590.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 103.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 352, 636–637; I, 103–104.

time an organic part of a larger catholicity which it may not violate by the pursuit of intolerant ends or by the exclusion of other sects from the confines of its charity. It may be said to insist only upon what is certainly known and held by all Christians; its peculiar attributes and teachings are dedicated to special objectives and are derived from particular needs. It must realize that the extent of its peculiarity is the measure of its weakness; the breadth of its tolerance and comprehension, the infallible indication of its catholicity. Thus it denies the possibility of salvation to no church and presumes not "to censure others to be out of the pale of the Church, but to leave them to stand or fall to their own master." It damns no man and no sect for the fact of dissent and cleaves with firm strength to the spiritual unity which binds it with all other churches.¹ The Church of England must abandon with a finality born of charity that "preposterous zeal, which is like Hell, hot without light, maketh errors to be essentials, and different opinions different religions, because it will not distinguish between the good foundation which is Christ, and the hay and stubble that is builded thereupon."²

Bramhall, like the other moderate Anglicans, proposed to gain the ends of tolerance not by setting the seal of finality upon sectarian differences, but by so broadening the foundations of the Church as to dissipate those differences. He clearly comprehended all the conservative elements of Protestant dissent within his generous conception of the Church, and he would have withheld the lash of persecution from the eccentric sects which lay without it. As an Irish prelate who had witnessed a terrible rebellion he was, however, sorely troubled by the special problems raised by Catholic dissent—by the necessity of finding some formula of accommodation which would cleanse the Church of England of the stigma of persecution while preserving the state from the danger of sedition stalking abroad in the habiliments of faith. Rome, he says repeatedly, is a true Church, in which salvation may be gained, despite her lamentable corruptions.³ Not only does she grasp firmly the essentials of faith, but she "retains many

¹ Bramhall, *Works*, II, 311.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 312, 580.

³ *Ibid.*, II, 38-40, 204-205.

other truths of an inferior nature, in doctrine, in discipline, in sacraments, and many lawful and laudable practices and observations.”¹ Hence we are guilty of hideous persecution and break the bonds of spiritual unity when we bear with repressive hands upon her faith or worship.

Bramhall felt that English policy had, on the whole, been intelligent and moderate in the definition and the administration of the Catholic problem. Unhappily, the Catholics have been fined and punished on occasion for the mere fact of faith and worship, but certainly it may be held that none has been punished with death save for an offence clearly treasonable.² No kingdom can neglect to secure its own preservation. Yet Bramhall was uncomfortably aware that treason may itself be defined in such wise as to include areas in which the pious conscience inspires political action. He devoutly wished that “all seditious opinions, and over-rigorous statutes, with the memory of them, were buried together in perpetual oblivion.”³ For the line between treason and religion has not been drawn, perhaps cannot be drawn, with sufficient clarity to avoid all stigma of persecution.⁴ In his own diocese of Derry, Bramhall indicated, he had endeavoured to act with great prudence and moderation. During eight years he had found it necessary to punish only one Roman Catholic, the titular Bishop of Cashel, whom he imprisoned for four days upon information that he was a Spanish agent.⁵ The necessity for exacting care, for rigorous defence against Catholic plots and intolerance has been very great in England, yet it may be that “a lesser coercion would have sufficed . . . for a remedy.”⁶ But in any case, Bramhall hoped that the Catholics as well as the Protestants in England had learned the lesson of tolerance in the awful fires of civil and religious war. Directly the Romanists have demonstrated their own Christian moderation the undesirable restraints which circumscribe them may at last be lifted. At that happy moment, he trusted, the structure of English tolerance might stand complete.

Bramhall sketched the broad outlines of religious reconstruction in England with rare tolerance and with philosophical

¹ Bramhall, *Works*, II, 55.

² *Ibid.*, I, 124-125; II, 246.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 126.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 118.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 124 ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 124.

moderation. He learned much from the Civil War, and his later thought and career exhibit a profound distrust of coercive practices and of rigid lines of definition. He supported with fervent, if somewhat vague, reasoning the comprehensive ideal which the great school of Anglican moderates prescribed as the cure for religious dissensions and conflicts in England. This ideal was firmly rooted in noble precedents of the Anglican past and offered for the future the hope of a generous tolerance which yet preserved the strength and cohesion of institutional Christianity. This temper of opinion was more widely held in the Church of England in 1660 than has been commonly supposed. That it did not possess sufficient strength to master vicious reaction, that it had not matured early enough to provide a reasonable and religious solution to the problem of dissent in England is part of the tragedy which the dynamic of history was working on the body of religion in England, and in all Europe as well. The solution, noble as it was, had come too late. The cure for religious bitterness and strife was to be surgical, not remedial. Men whose thought was essentially secular and political, men moved by persuasions born of scepticism and indifference, stood prepared to impose the chilly peace of religious toleration—a peace which tacitly admits that the objectives of the spiritual warfare are themselves invalid.

5. HERBERT THORNDIKE, 1598–1672

Herbert Thorndike,¹ of all the great Anglican moderates,

¹ Thorndike was a native of Lincolnshire. He was educated at Cambridge, where he was graduated B.A. in 1617 and three years later was elected a fellow of Trinity College. For more than twenty-five years he was a distinguished scholar in that university, particularly in the fields of Oriental languages and theology. As a moderate Thorndike was quietly opposed to the Laudian definition of the Church, but none the less accepted many lucrative preferments which he lost during the Commonwealth. He seems to have lived comfortably during the Cromwellian period on the fractional payments from his former benefices and was able to maintain his studies without serious interruption. He gave much attention during this period to an ambitious plan for restoring Christian unity in England by establishing the Church firmly upon the certain bases of primitive catholicity. During the early years of the Restoration he took a minor part in the Savoy Conference and in the fruitless discussions which envisaged the administrative reform of the Church of England. During the last years of his life he lived quietly and somewhat inconspicuously in London and Cambridge.

alone exhibits in his thought the harsh effects of reaction. There is, in other words, a very marked hardening and deterioration of Thorndike's thought in the years following the Restoration. It should also be remarked that Thorndike's thought wants in clarity and directness, that it is suffused with a vagueness and weakened by inconsistencies which betoken either personal uncertainty or personal fears. We are principally concerned with his works written prior to 1660, but it is not too harsh to say that the historian could cull either a theory of tolerance or a brief for intolerance when the entire scheme of his thought is considered. It is perhaps just to say that Thorndike was a man of tolerant inclinations whose sensitive and impressionable mind was influenced by many currents of English thought. Thus it is evident that he was powerfully influenced by the Anglican moderates, that he had fallen under the mighty sway of the Hobbesian logic which he did not fully understand, and that he did not remain unmoved by the vicious counsels of revenge which dominated Anglican thought in the decade following the ill-fated Savoy Conference.

The unhappy confusion which mars Thorndike's thought is amply demonstrated in his treatment of the question of the role of the magistrate in the Christian Church. He repeatedly took the position that the Church has an existence apart from the state and, indeed, will exhibit its purest character when it is free of the overweening weight of the temporal sword. The spiritual society disciplines itself with the sword of excommunication which it must retain within its own grasp.¹ When religion is subjected to political control men place their hope of eternal salvation upon the dubious foundations of historical change and political accident. How, Thorndike enquired, shall the "common profession of piety or Christianity oblige several nations to obey those laws, whereby several sovereignties may establish things contrary to Christianity, but by obliging them to profess contrary to what they believe?"² The ruler, then, enjoys no legitimate power over

¹ Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, I, 325.

² Thorndike, Herbert, *Of the principles of Christian truth*, in *The theological works of Herbert Thorndike, etc.* (Oxford, 1844-1856), II, 378.

religion either in its establishment, or negatively in its repression.¹ A dangerous and irreligious Erastianism has so monstrously expanded the spiritual power of the prince that the faith of the subject has been bound to the whim of the ruler.² Such a view secures the prostitution of faith and ensures the total ruin of the Christian Church.

Thorndike was patently groping for some source of authority which would free the National Church from the sovereign authority which had created and sustained it. He recognized that grave evils had arisen as a necessary consequence of the close union of the civil and the religious spheres, and he correctly detected the ruinous implications of Erastianism. Yet he was unwilling and unable to renounce without reservation the solid strength of magisterial support which, in his view, had alone preserved Christianity from disruption into innumerable fragments. Thus he argued, in contradiction to his own mature thought, that the state possesses the inherent right to enforce by law any religion it happens to favour. He recalled with grim honesty that what the Church of England was had been the result of the decisions of laymen who paid but scant attention to the advice of the clergy.³ Hence it was his hope that this Church might gradually be refined in its profession of truth and that the limits of its charity might be very considerably enlarged.

A similar uncertainty weakens Thorndike's earnest consideration of the important question of the employment of force in religious causes. One feels throughout his discussion that Thorndike stands intellectually persuaded of the necessity as well as of the virtue inherent in religious liberty, yet his institutional instincts and his dread of sectarian divisions restrain him from fully accepting the position to which his logic has impelled him.

The Church, Thorndike insisted, is endowed with none of the powers of restraint which lie at the basis of the state.

¹ Thorndike, Herbert, *Just weights and measures: that is, the present state of religion weighed in the balance, and measured by the standard of the sanctuary* (L., 1662), in *Works*, V, 101-102.

² *Ibid.*, *Works*, V, 103.

³ Thorndike, Herbert, *The right of the church in a Christian state* (L., 1649), in *Works*, I, 575.

Christ specifically denounced force as an instrument of religion and those who have sought to follow Him have relied wholly upon the spiritual power implicit in the gospel message.¹ The Church therefore exacts by persuasion an obedience which the state compels by force. There must be no confusion between the wholly separate spheres of religious and political loyalty. Christianity "importeth no temporal privilege or advantage of this present world" and consequently no man may "advance and propagate his Christianity by force."² It follows that temporal punishments for religious offences have no place in the true Church and that every man is answerable to God alone for the religion to which his reason inclines him.³ The sovereign enjoys no knowledge and no power in religion not exercised by his meanest subject and hence can impose no penalties for religious dissent.⁴ Religion and vital faith flourish only under conditions of complete freedom which permit every man to choose his faith calmly and reasonably and to profess it before all the world.⁵

Thorndike maintained that the persecution which had disgraced the Church and endangered the civil society was derived from an unhappy misunderstanding of the Old Testament. The specific penalties directly imposed by God amongst the Jews have been impiously insinuated into the spiritual religion which Christ has ordained in the gospels.⁶ No corporal punishment as a cure for a religious offence can possibly be defended within the compass of the Christian ethic. This is not to say that men who under the mistaken persuasion of religious zeal endanger the peace and stability of the state may not be punished, but both the offence and the punishment are in this

¹ Thorndike, *Right of the church in a Christian state*, Works, I, 399-400.

² *Ibid.*, Works, I, 576.

³ Thorndike, *Of the principles of Christian truth*, Works, II, 403-404.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Works, II, 405.

⁵ It should be observed that Thorndike retained this view with tolerable consistency in his *Discourse of the forbearance* published in 1670. Though opposed in principle to a general toleration of dissent, he vehemently denounced rigorous punishment of error as inimical to religion and as a violation of common morality. He proposed to harass dissent with minor disabilities and to deny to persons of dubious orthodoxy the right of burial in consecrated ground. (Works, V, 385, 470-483.)

⁶ Thorndike, *Right of the church in a Christian state*, Works, I, 577.

instance civil. Likewise those who trouble the peace of the civil society by an intemperate and forcible effort to secure the dominance of their faith lie properly under the sanctions of civil punishment.¹ But the very nature of religion requires that no man shall be made to suffer death, exile, or heavy penalty for the most grievous and obviously impious religious error.²

Thorndike was clearly convinced in all his writings that under no circumstance may heresy and dissent be severely punished. At the same time he was rather confused and uncertain concerning the degree of restraint which the dominant, though he meant the true, religious society may impose upon flagrant and eccentric sectarianism. In general, he was content to leave heresy unmolested with the understanding that when religious belief occasioned offences against moral or political stability, restraint should be imposed in the interests of the civil society.³ There is, he concludes, no certain rule which may be formulated in this matter. Restraint may be desirable in order to protect society from the ever endemic virus of fanaticism and ruinous anarchy, but it must not be exercised under the delusion that religion is thereby implemented or protected. Thorndike wandered lost and confused in the dark frontier of jurisdiction that lies between the religious and the civil society—a frontier whose bounds have even now been but vaguely and uncertainly delimited.

The evil effects which persecution and undue severity have wrought in Christianity may be cured, Thorndike urged, only by enlarging the confines of the Church to their outermost limits. In proposing this Latitudinarian solution for the English religious difficulties, Thorndike betrayed his essential conservatism by drawing those lines of definition much more strictly than had his moderate colleagues. He had previously submitted that the fundamental doctrine and the apostolic constitution of the Church had been clearly stated by the first six General Councils. Though not zealously devoted to episcopacy, he likewise suggested that for historical and

¹ Thorndike, *Right of the church in a Christian state*, Works, I, 578.

² *Ibid.*, Works, I, 580-581.

³ *Ibid.*, Works, I, 583, 614.

administrative reasons this frame of government was best adapted to English needs.¹ The Church of England should be defined as broadly as these limiting elements will permit and if such a conception is charitably administered, all the principal religious parties in England may in time be united in a true catholicity.² For the great religious groups—the Anglicans, the Catholics, the Puritans, and the Erastians—all adhere to the essentials of faith and are joined in a true spiritual unity which wants only cultivation and direction.³ Hence patience, charity, and tolerance will secure to England a firmer peace and a larger latitude than she has ever known.

Thorndike sought to reconstruct the fabric of the Anglican Establishment upon foundations somewhat broader than those laid down by the Elizabethan architects of the Church of England. The Church should consciously seek the inclusion within its broad communion of the more stable and conservative elements of Christianity and should ever hold the door of its charity wide for all sects that sound preaching and reasonable persuasion can induce to enter. There would lie outside this large circumference of orthodoxy a considerable body of peripheral religious opinions and sectarian organizations towards which the Church and the magistrate must form some decision if stability and peace are to be restored.

Thorndike dealt honestly if somewhat vaguely with the problem of dissent. Surely, he submitted, the accepted religion of a state may protect itself against slanderous and blasphemous attacks from militant dissent which itself transgresses the bounds not only of tolerance but of decency.⁴ But this does not presume

¹ Lacey, T. A., *Herbert Thorndike, etc.* (L., 1929), 118-120.

² The eccentric sects, including the Anabaptists, Quakers, Fifth Monarchy Men, and, inexplicably, the Independents, he could not comprehend within the limits of his definition. (Thorndike, Herbert, *The due way of composing the differences on foot, preserving the church* [L., 1660], in *Works*, V, 39.)

³ Thorndike, *Just weights and measures*, *Works*, V, 103. Thorndike, writing in 1667, discarded many of the moderate views which he had so fervently defended at the time of the Restoration. He was apparently disillusioned by the failure of the plans for securing a larger comprehension and was grievously troubled by the persistence of the stubborn core of dissent. (Thorndike, Herbert, *The plea of weakness and tender consciences discussed and answered, etc.* (L. [1667]), in *Works*, V, 377.)

⁴ Thorndike, Herbert, *A review of the foregoing discourse* [i.e., *The right of the church in the Christian state*], in *Works*, I, 725-726.

that the Established Church will bring ruin upon itself in the act of destroying dissent by the weapons of force. The very law of nature and "civility" as well as the inherent nature of religion guarantees to all men the right "to live after the religion which they profess; and therefore enables no state so to punish men for so doing."¹ Furthermore, Thorndike pointed out in an earlier work, the retention of religious convictions cannot be separated from the positive expression of those convictions in worship, which is the necessary consequence of faith.² The integrity of religious opinions lies at the very root of human nature, and both religion and the civil society are shaken when the rights of conscience are invaded.

This brave and unequivocal defence of complete toleration could not, however, survive the hot blasts of reaction which accompanied the Restoration. Though Thorndike remained steadfastly devoted to the principle of liberty of opinion, he introduced very significant reservations upon the toleration of extreme dissent. No authority exists for the punishment of belief which the state and church denominate false, but the state may at least restrain the public exercise of an heretical faith.³ Every effort should be undertaken to win radical dissenters to the communion of the Church which has defined its creed and organized its government as liberally as the Word of God allows. Stubborn dissent should not be permitted freely to organize and worship, though it may not under any circumstance be persecuted. Thus the area of governmental control is very narrow indeed. Thorndike suggested that such erroneous communions might be permitted to worship privately under somewhat onerous conditions and fairly severe penalties which would at least discourage nonconformity.⁴ This policy he would seem to propose for the irreconcilable Presbyterians, the Independents, the spiritual Catholics, and the lesser sects in England.⁵

¹ Thorndike, *Review of the foregoing discourse*, Works, I, 728.

² Thorndike, *Of the principles of Christian truth*, Works, II, 404.

³ Thorndike, *Review of the foregoing discourse*, Works, I, 728-730.

⁴ Thorndike, *Due way of composing the differences*, Works, V, 40-41; *et vide* his later remarks in a *Discourse of the forbearance*, Works, V, 480-483.

⁵ Thorndike, *Right of the church in a Christian state*, Works, I, 620-621, 628; Thorndike, *Due way of composing the differences*, Works, V, 40-41.

Thorndike did not grasp the principle of religious liberty as certainly and securely as did his greater colleagues, but we may assume that the wavering uncertainty which harassed his sensitive mind typified the sober and pious Anglican conscience which, since it faltered in the early months of the Restoration, forfeited leadership and control to reactionary elements within the Church that were royalist rather than Anglican. The bitter experience of twenty years of kaleidoscopic political and religious change, the unhappy consequences of blind and ferocious sectarian conflict had persuaded Thorndike, and England as well, of the futility, the criminality, and the positive danger of further religious coercion. But Thorndike clung with nostalgic irrationality to a noble ideal of a Church Catholic which every counsel of experience and intelligence informed him could not be attained in a modern state. His essentially conservative nature did not permit him to define the limits of his latitude with sufficient liberality to view all sectarianism with equanimity; yet his tolerance and chastened common sense informed him that eccentric extremism could not be repressed with the conviction and flaming zeal that must animate persecution. He proposed in essence that dissent should be made as uncomfortable as possible—a position which rather symbolizes the fact of dominance than reflects the militant wrath of an infallible Church against the hosts of error. The spirit of intolerance had truly been dispelled in Anglican thought.

6. THE MINOR ANGLICAN THEORISTS

a. Denunciation of coercive courses and intemperate zeal

The lesser Anglican thinkers lent strong and reasoned defence to the moderate conception of the Church of England which the more notable apologists were propounding with such luminous and tolerant charity. There is every evidence that the main body of Anglicanism had never been persuaded to the Laudian philosophy of uniformity, and the moderates repudiated that philosophy without reservation at the advent of the Civil War. The religious struggle which marked the

history of this era etched deep into the fabric of Anglican thought a profound distrust of all coercive practices and a stalwart disavowal of the fanatical devotion to sectarian ends from which persecution springs.

Every communion, it was urged, which defines religious truth with rigid infallibility and which seeks to impose a particular gloss upon the general conscience of Christendom stands convicted of an impious and destructive intolerance.¹ Religious truth can never have more than subjective validity and we err grievously when we seek to enforce our conception of truth upon other men and other churches. Hence the zeal with which we urge our faith upon Christendom must be tempered with a salutary moderation. Immoderate zeal too easily violates charity and kindles combustions which destroy the very structure of religion and consume the fabric of the civil society.² So many systems of infallibility have sprung into militant being since the Protestant Reformation, so many definitions of absolute truth stand grimly opposed to each other, that a charitable and tolerant solution of the problem of diversity will have to be imposed by reasonable and pious men upon the blind and warring fanaticism which rends the Christian world.

The divisive fanaticisms which harass the Church of God have sprung principally from the arrogant and ridiculous conceit which causes private men to elevate their opinions into

¹ Spelman, Sir Henry, *A Protestants account of his orthodox holding in matters of religion, etc.* (L., 1642), in Somers, J., *A collection of scarce and valuable tracts, etc.* (L., 1748-1752), XIII, 62-63. Sir Henry Spelman (1564?-1641) was a member of a prominent Norfolk family. He was educated at Cambridge, where he was graduated in 1583. He resided in Norfolk for some years since he was responsible for the management of extensive family properties in that county. While a country gentleman he began the antiquarian researches that were to gain for him deserved renown as a scholar. He served in Parliament in 1597 and was appointed High Sheriff of Norfolk in 1604. At the request of James I he undertook a survey of the tangled land titles of Ireland and following this ambitious undertaking settled near Sir Robert Cotton in London. He was a leading member of Cotton's circle, devoting many years to a great glossary of legal terms and to work on the history of English law. Though highly critical of the Laudian policy and genuinely devoted to a moderate conception of Anglicanism, Spelman was vigorous in his denunciation of Puritan extremism.

² *Regulated zeal. Or, an earnest request to all zealously affected Christians, to seeke the desired reformation in a peaceable way, etc.* (L., 1641), 2-5.

sacrosanct systems of doctrine.¹ The fiery persecution with which the several communions assail each other is in reality a confession of weakness and of uncertainty concerning the nature and limits of truth. Religion has in consequence been prostituted by coercive practices and has become the prey of fanatical demagogues who offer a plausible, though specious, explanation of simplicity for matters that are complex, who speak certainly of problems not understood by mortal men. Passions are whipped into frenzy and that "enmity grows excessive, which hath zeale to kindle it, and pretence of religion to warrant it."² The "medium" course in religion, so essential both for the vitality of the Church and for the preservation of civil peace, is sacrificed to the arrogant ambitions of essentially irreligious men.³ Pride and passion sweep away the sane counsels of reason while a fanatical devotion to intricate minutiae of doctrine obscures the firm foundation of religious

¹ [Hammond, Henry], *Mysterium religionis recognitum. An expedient for composing difference in religion, etc.* (L., 1649), 17. Henry Hammond (1605-1660) was educated at Eton and at Oxford. He was for some years a fellow at Oxford but in 1629 entered the ministry and took a parish in Kent which he administered with remarkable success. Enjoying a wide reputation as a moderate divine, Hammond was nominated to the Westminster Assembly but declined to serve. Though critical of all extremisms, he served the king loyally despite considerable personal danger until he was removed from his various posts by parliamentary orders in 1647. (*S.P. Dom.*, Charles I, 1645-1647, p. 597.) He was under surveillance for some time, but was ultimately permitted to retire to Worcestershire, where he quietly continued his distinguished ministry without serious molestation. Hammond was at once one of the gentlest and strongest of the moderate group of Anglican divines.

² Reynolds, Edward, *A treatise of the passions and faculties of the soul of man, etc.* (L., 1640), in *The Works of Edw[ard] Reynolds, etc.* (L., 1658), 961. Edward Reynolds (1599-1676), who was educated at Oxford, was for some time a preacher at Lincoln's Inn. Well known as a preacher, Reynolds became a leader in the moderate Anglican party which sought some basis for the accommodation of religious differences during the early months of the Civil War. He was a member of the Westminster Assembly and after some hesitation subscribed to the *Covenant* in 1644. During the Cromwellian period he accepted a number of important posts upon appointment by the government. At the time of the Restoration Reynolds conformed without difficulties of conscience and warmly espoused the cause of an accommodation which would define the restored Establishment along the lines which moderate theory had so eloquently defended. He was appointed Bishop of Norwich in 1661 and, guided by a cool and tolerant moderation, attained notable success in a diocese which comprehended the most firmly rooted and articulate dissent in England.

³ *A plea for moderation* (L., 1642), no pagin.

faith.¹ This is the evil fate which overwhelms the Church of Christ when the persuasion of moderation and the balm of Christian charity are abandoned for rigorous courses.

b. On persecution

The moderate Anglican thinkers renounced with very few evidences of regret the classical ideal of a religious uniformity disciplined by repressive agencies which so easily acquire the weight of persecution. Reynolds declared that he was prepared to allow men liberty even in fundamental errors of faith,² though he hoped that the magistrate would "frown" upon heresy and sin which violated too scandalously the ethic of a Christian society.³ He could hardly persuade himself that the limits of toleration were not exceeded "when Socinian catechisms are taught to speak English, and to flie from presses to the closets of unstable persons."⁴ Yet so great was the evil of persecution and so rare the phenomenon of really damning error that Reynolds, like his moderate colleagues, preferred

¹ Sanderson, Robert, *Works* (ed. by W. Jacobson) (Oxford, 1854), VI, 388. Sanderson (1587-1663), after a notable career at Oxford, entered the priesthood in 1619. He administered several charges and established an enviable reputation as a learned theologian and as a moderate religious thinker. He was appointed Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford in 1642, a post from which he was ejected by the parliamentary visitors in 1648. Sanderson continued his ministry without serious difficulty throughout the revolutionary period. He used the Book of Common Prayer in his services for some years, and even during a period when parliamentary troops were quartered in his parish was able to employ the essential portions of the traditional service. In 1650 there were rather vigorous Presbyterian protests against his use of the Prayer Book, which he met by delivering the service from memory. It is apparent that this notable moderate suffered no serious molestation during the whole of the revolutionary era. (*Works*, V, 38-39.) Sanderson, who was appointed Bishop of Lincoln in 1660, assumed a leading role in the efforts begun shortly after the Restoration to find some formula for a Latitudinarian constitution of the Church of England.

² Reynolds, Edward, *The substance of two sermons one touching composing of controversies* [preached in 1657]. *Another touching unity of judgement and love amongst brethren* [preached in 1658], etc. (L., 1659), in *Twenty sermons*, etc. (L., 1660), 36-37.

³ Reynolds, Edward, *Israels prayer in time of trouble . . . or an explication of the fourteenth chapter of the prophet Hosea, in seven sermons*, etc. (1645), in *Works*, 746.

⁴ Reynolds, *The substance of two sermons one touching composing of controversies. Another touching unity of judgement and love amongst brethren*, 14.

to incur the risk of undue leniency rather than add still more fuel to the fires of persecution. The way of true religion lies in a broad moderate course which scrupulously avoids the extremes of sectarian anarchy and of persecuting tyranny.¹ The history of Christianity records no instance when positive good has been accomplished by the use of force.² The world has been laid in ruins by the triumph of the persecuting psychology which has perverted the human spirit and has dulled those moral sensitivities which are the mark of Christian manhood. England has been purged of this infamy in the flames of war; from the travail of her experience has come the resolution that every Englishman shall be secured in his faith against the monstrous crime of persecution.³

Furthermore, the Anglican apologists submitted that the tragic experience of Christian history had abundantly demonstrated the ruin which persecution brings to religion itself. Again and again it has been proved that rigorous courses are wholly ineffective against the resolved conscience, whether that conscience be possessed of error or truth. Indeed, "publique, and frequent sufferings, in persons in any repute for piety and learning . . . do onely move the greater pity, and compassion to them in the minds of the spectators, and hearers of their calamities; which are by many decryd, by most suspected, for oppressions . . . rather than just punishments, or convictions."⁴ The perpetuity of an error is best ensured

¹ *A dialogue betwixt three travellers, as accidentally they did meet on the highway: Crucy Cringe, a Papist, Accepted Weighall, a Professour of the Church of England, and Factious Wrest-Writ, a Brownist, etc.* (L., 1641), 3.

² Reynolds, *The substance of two sermons one touching composing of controversies. Another touching unity of judgement and love amongst brethren*, 14-15.

³ *An express from the knights and gentlemen now engaged with Sir George Booth; To the city and citizens of London, and all other free-men of England* (L., 1659), s.sh.

⁴ G[auden], J[ohn], *A petitionary remonstrance presented to O[liver] P[rotector], etc.* (L., 1659), 15. John Gauden (1605-1662), the son of a clergyman, was born in Essex and was educated at Cambridge. He was for some time chaplain to the Earl of Warwick and in the early months of the Civil War shared Warwick's sympathy with the parliamentary cause. He was likewise opposed to the extremist Anglican position, holding that far-reaching reforms were essential in the Church. Though his political conscience was shocked by the execution of the king, Gauden continued to write and speak in the interests of moderate Anglicanism. In 1656 he undertook without success an interesting effort to effect an understanding between

by a persecution which enables resolved men to demonstrate irrefutably the tenacity of their faith and the heroism of their devotion.¹ Error, quite as truly as orthodoxy, has its immortal roll of martyrs. The human soul holds with a kind of desperate zeal to that opinion to which it is inclined by reasons of birth, education, or rational conviction. The slow solvent of education and persuasion alone provides the ultimate hope of securing that unanimity of profession and worship which has ever shimmered just ahead of Christian men like a mirage of unessential beauty.

This is the conclusion to which all parties in England have been compelled by both the harsh tuition of experience and the positive persuasion of religion. Hence, certain Anglican petitioners argued with great weight, a revolutionary government founded upon the principle of religious freedom can scarcely deny toleration to pious men who are in conscience bound to an old and conservative way of worship. They reminded the government that even the Turks declined to incur the odium of persecution, and demanded, "why will ye, who being more modest, doe judge your selves subject to errors, force men to that now, from which upon better information ye may depart tomorrow?"²

c. The principles of moderation and latitude

The Church must therefore find in the principle of latitude a new conception of unity and must discover in tolerance new strength and vitality. The Christian world must halt in its mad course of ruin to take stock of its essential verities, re-dedicating its every energy to the pursuit of the spiritual mission for which Christ intended it. This may be accomplished only when the Church is defined so broadly as to include all good and pious men; it may be maintained only when peace and the rule of reason are secured by the extension

the moderate Anglicans and the Presbyterians along the lines suggested by Archbishop Ussher. Gauden was appointed Bishop of Exeter shortly after the restoration of the monarchy.

¹ [Gauden], *A petitionary remonstrance*, 16.

² *To the right honorable, the Lords and Commons, &c. The humble petition of troubled minds* (L., 1647), s.sh.

of the benefits of religious liberty to all peaceable men. So embroiled have Christian nations and churches been in their own hideous wars and persecutions, so arrogant has been their pursuit of narrowly defined objectives that they have claimed a morality which they do not possess and a monopoly of truth which their bitter divisions belie. The Christian world should stand ashamed before the piety and compassion of pagan princes which contrasts strangely with the cruel zeal and fratricidal strife of Christendom.¹ It may be that "wee are in the right way to heaven; they . . . in the wrong way, but if we stand still, and walk not, they will be as neer their journies end as we."²

It is the peculiar tragedy of Christendom that it stands united in the essentials of faith, in true unity, yet wastes its substance in intestinal broils over matters that are completely inconsequential. It would almost seem as though men viciously refused to recognize the fact of their common Christianity. They are possessed by a resolution "no less desperate for the soul, if not rather much more, than it would be for the body, if a man should vow he would never eat till all the clocks in the city should strike twelve together."³ In all other subjects men can disagree with equanimity but in the unfathomable controversies of religion they seek to bring each other to the gallows for an opinion that may be devoid even of rational demonstration. Surely the herd instinct, if not the persuasion

¹ Ross, Alexander, *IIANΣEBEIA: or, a view of all religions in the world. . . . Also a discovery of all known heresies, etc.* (L., 1655), 167-171. This remarkable book was one of the first really comprehensive works on comparative religion published in the English language. While not highly critical in his methods, Ross examines every religion carefully, noting both its good and bad qualities. The work is marked by an objective temper of mind and is clearly based upon very wide reading. Ross excuses his subject and method with the plea that while "the world is pestered with too many religions, and the more is the pitty; yet this book made them not, but they made this book." (Pref.) Alexander Ross (1591-1654) was a native of Aberdeen and was apparently educated in the university in that city. He was appointed master of the grammar school at Southampton in 1616 and in the next decade was designated a chaplain to Charles I. He apparently lived in Southampton, probably continuing as a schoolmaster, until 1643, when the king appointed him vicar of Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight. Ross was a versatile writer on many subjects and during a busy life accumulated a considerable fortune and a substantial reputation.

² *Ibid.*, Pref.

³ Sanderson, *Works*, I, 237.

of reason and religion, should cause men to find common grounds of faith for their own preservation.¹ Even the Catholics and Protestants should sheathe the sword which has been unable to sever the bond which secures them to the fundamentals of faith.² The Christian world must discover the foundation of its unity of faith and profession, and that soon, lest it be destroyed by the consuming fires of an insensate bigotry.

The task of Christian reconciliation is in fact simple. All Christian communions agree upon certain fundamentals of faith which each professes with clarity and precision because they are transcendently manifest and extremely simple.³ Thus Christian unity is in reality complete and no man and no church may destroy it for opinions and doctrines not clear to all.⁴ In all points of difference which do not involve the fundamentals of faith, complete tolerance and liberty must in Christian necessity be extended to every human being.⁵ God will in His own time make known to us the vast body of truth that is not now evident, either by revelation or, more probably, by the slow cumulative knowledge that men gain when their minds and spirits are free.⁶ By calm enquiry and judicious consultations some public worship can be established upon the eternal rocks of the fundamentals, leaving to those who err "the best quarter and tolleration that Christian charity (with safety) can inspire."⁷ Directly the essential tenets of Christian faith are "fully and invincibly settled by common consent,"⁸ the slow task of rebuilding will have begun, the beneficent salve of moderation will have been applied to the wounds which persecution has inflicted upon the body of faith. Discussion, reasonable compromise, and charitable bearing towards others alone ensure the salvation which an harassed people seeks. Surely it is better "that inke, rather than bloud

¹ [Hammond], *Mysterium religionis recognitum*, 2.

² Sanderson, *Works*, V, 79, 246.

³ [Hammond], *Mysterium religionis recognitum*, 10-12.

⁴ *Regulated zeal*, 5; Spelman, *A Protestant's account*, in Somers, *Tracts*, XIII, 62.

⁵ Reynolds, *The substance of two sermons one touching composing of controversies. Another touching unity of judgement and love amongst brethren*, 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

⁷ [Hammond], *Mysterium religionis recognitum*, 15.

⁸ *The heads of reasons, for which a generall councill of Protestants ought to be called together in England* (L., 1641), 3, 7-8.

may be spilt; that paper, rather than soules may perish."¹ England, as well as all Christendom, stands under the compulsion of history. She must choose between the sane and clear counsels of moderation and the frantic and destroying persuasion of bigotry and persecution.

d. The problem of toleration

The moderate Anglicans evolved during the revolutionary period a theory of the Establishment and a conception of legal toleration for dissent which were ultimately to be accepted as the corner-stone of English political and religious development. They proposed that the State Church should define itself as liberally and as broadly as the fundamentals of Christianity permit. This communion will by its very nature include the mass of Christians in the nation and may hope in good season to win all men to the truth which it professes. But it will seek unity by means of spiritual persuasion alone and will exhibit complete tolerance as the prime evidence of its catholicity. It will endeavour to secure liberty for all men and all sects that do not overthrow the fundamentals of faith or undermine the safety of the civil state.² All dissenting elements, therefore, that worship quietly and peaceably must be guaranteed complete liberty.³ Even eccentric areas of dissent must be permitted so long as they do not warp liberty of conscience into liberty of contention and faction.⁴ The Church, then, will gain its strength and its infinite advantage over error by the very fact of the tolerance which its supports with Christian vigour. For such a Church will enter the lists against heresy with calm conviction of truth and with assurance of its own charity. It will repose unlimited confidence in the efficacy of that truth with which Christ armed His Church against the hosts of error.⁵

The Anglican apologists were prepared to extend liberty of

¹ *Pro-quiratio . . . or a petition to the people: for a Christian and unbloudy decision of cases of conscience, etc.* (L., 1642), 3.

² Ross, *IIANΣEBEIA: or, a view of all religions*, 506-507.

³ *Ibid.*, 507-508.

⁴ [Spelman], *A Protestant's account*, in Somers, *Tracts*, XIII, 69.

⁵ Ross, *IIANΣEBEIA: or, a view of all religions*, 390.

conscience and freedom of worship to every sect that did not itself violate the conditions of the tolerance which permitted it to exist. This solution, it will be observed, was precisely that towards which the gravity of experience had inclined the Cromwellian government. As Hammond expressed it, all dissent which is based upon conviction and "private disobedience" should be scrupulously tolerated. It is only when fanatical groups invade other consciences with an "overweening conceit," with a fury born of pretended revelation, or when they impugn the sovereignty of the state, that society must restrain them.¹ These are restraints which society imposes as an automatic reflex wherewith it defends its own organic character; they are in no sense derived from the sources from which religious persecution springs. For the case of tolerance has been conceded, has, indeed, been imposed upon England by history. It must now be apparent that men cannot be held responsible for their religious convictions, since "the ablest men cannot change their opinions when they will, nor will honest men pretend a change where is none."² England will find civil peace and Christian unity once more only when men of all parties dedicate themselves with intense conviction to the cause of "the freedome and protection of all virtuous and religious people, by what name soever differenced from us."³ A moderate temper of mind, a tolerant spirit, and ordinary decency of conduct will accomplish that which war and persecution have failed to achieve.⁴ In tolerance the Church will discover renewed strength, the Christian conscience dignity and security.

The case of religious toleration was argued by the moderate Anglicans with a vigour and clarity born of the disillusionment which civil war and revolutionary experimentation had

¹ [Hammond], *Mysterium religionis recognitum*, 15-16. Hammond made only a very limited contribution to the development of the theory of religious toleration. His importance in this connection has frequently been much too enthusiastically estimated (*vide esp. Cambridge History of English Literature* VII, 148).

² [Gauden], *A petitionary remonstrance*, 8, 10.

³ *An express from the knights and gentlemen now engaged with Sir George Booth; To the city and citizens of London, and all other free-men of England*, s.sh.

⁴ Frank, Mark, *Sermons, etc.* (Oxford, 1849), I, 51-53.

brought to all parties in England. Men were at last persuaded that differences of opinion had become irreconcilable; that a new design for the future must be drawn in which England could accommodate itself to the phenomena of religious variety. The quarrel was no longer so much concerned with the theoretical acceptance of the fact of dissent as with the ways and means by which the necessary institutional accommodations could best be made. How, it was enquired, can England build firmly the foundations of civil stability; how can she best impose tolerance upon sects which desire dominance rather than liberty? The discussion, in other words, was passing from the sphere of theory to the realm of politics.

A brilliant pamphlet, published in 1659, entitled the *Interest of England Stated*, lent to this pressing question persuasive and pragmatic consideration at a critical moment in the history of the nation.¹ England must face with honest realism the changes which a generation of war and partisan struggle have wrought in the structure of her thought and institutions. She must seek peace, not the transitory dominance of still another faction. She must take care that the Romanists do not gather up the reins of power since this would ensure the destruction of every other party and revive "Queen Marie's reformation by fire and faggot, with all the terrors of the Inquisition."² Similarly, the royalists must abandon their dream of an absolute monarchy, and the Church of England must renounce the ideal of an exclusive uniformity which cannot possibly be sustained "against so great a multitude of eager dissenters." Nor can a basis for peace and unity be

¹ There is strong reason for believing that this tract was from the pen of John Fell (1625-1686), who was educated at Oxford where he proceeded M.A. in 1643. He entered the royal army shortly after leaving the university. Fell, who was ordained in 1647, returned to Oxford after the Civil War and quietly maintained Anglican worship in the city throughout the Interregnum. In 1660 he was designated canon of Christ Church (*S.P. Dom.*, Charles II, viii, 79, 80), which he rebuilt and reorganized. Fell was subsequently created Bishop of Oxford. Further study of Fell's career might throw much-needed light on the organization of the Anglican clergy in England during the Interregnum and the means by which the traditional services were maintained.

² [Fell, John], *The interest of England stated, etc.* (L., 1659), in Maseres, Francis, *Select tracts relating to the Civil Wars in England in the Reign of King Charles the First, etc.* (L., 1815), 678.

discovered in the intolerant aspirations of the Presbyterians, in the military despotism of the army, or in the illegal pretensions of a Parliament which enjoys neither the confidence nor the support of the nation at large. In fact, no party possesses sufficient strength, is sufficiently English, to provide the security and dispassionate regard for the general welfare of the nation essential to enduring government.¹

The restoration of civil peace, therefore, can be gained only by the merging of party interests for the general good. The failure of the illegal revolutionary governments to hold the structure of the state intact demonstrates that this can be accomplished only by the restoration of a monarchy limited in its powers by adequate constitutional restraints. By the same token, the attainment of religious peace can be ensured only by the establishment of a moderate and comprehensive Church of England which grants peace and toleration to all those who dissent from it.² The restoration of Anglicanism must in itself constitute a great gain for the principle of liberty of conscience. The restored Church must accept and greatly extend the progress which has been made towards a larger liberty, and this it is eminently fitted to do because it will enjoy the security that comes from general support in the nation at large. Tolerance can rest only upon security and moderation born of strength; from sectarian weakness and dissension are born the "popular fewds and animosities, the most licentious and turbulent of all persecutions."³

The structure of tolerance which may be secured under a moderate and comprehensive Establishment will be at once complete and enduring. Thus, Bishop Williams had recommended as early as 1644 that even the Jews should be granted a large liberty and a full tolerance. When they are permitted freely to live in a Christian society they may "the sooner at all times by . . . charity and prayers be reduced, the more willingly to imbrace the faith of Christ, when as unwillingly wee may neither compell them, nor take their children to be

¹ [Fell], *Interest of England stated*, in Maseres, *Select tracts*, 678-680.

² *Ibid.*, 683.

³ M., R., *A letter to General Monck, in answer to his of the 23th of January, directed to Mr. Rolle, etc.* (L., 1660), 5.

baptized from them.”¹ The Roman Catholics admittedly constituted a more difficult problem. No valid objection can be laid against the toleration of their faith and worship if means may be discovered to secure the civil government against seditious behaviour. Directly Protestantism itself has gained strength through mutual forbearance it may safely grant a large measure of toleration to the Romanists.² The Presbyterians and the Puritans are separated from the Church only by a rigidity which will find “easy atonement” in an atmosphere of moderation. The Baptists and other extremist sects may err in their enthusiasm and in minor points of doctrine, but should not “be esteemed and expelled as deadly enemies; but . . . suffered and respected as weak friends, if they proceed not” to incendiary and seditious extremes.³ Finally, the Independents, who have defended religious liberty as a cardinal tenet of faith, can raise no quarrel against a religious settlement which accepts as axiomatic the principles for which they have striven with such fine resolution.⁴

7. SUMMARY

When the temper and structure of moderate Anglican thought is considered it may be held that at no other time in its history has the Church of England ever attained so large and unanimous a conception of its mission, so rich and tolerant a charity, and so reasonable and thoughtful a definition of the sources of its strength as during the period of its greatest physical weakness. It will be observed that the thought of the moderate leaders forms a strong and cohesive synthesis despite the fact that most of these men were by the political realities of the decades under survey barred from the ministry and deprived of intimate contact with each other.

The historian must lend great respect to a body of thought

¹ Williams, Griffith, *Jura majestatis, the rights of kings both in church and state* (Oxford, 1644), 108.

² [Fell], *Interest of England stated*, in Maseres, *Select tracts*, 685; Williams, *Jura majestatis*, 108-109.

³ Williams, *Jura majestatis*, 111; [Fell], *Interest of England stated*, in Maseres, *Select tracts*, 686-687.

⁴ [Fell], *Interest of England stated*, in Maseres, *Select tracts*, 686-687.

calmly carved out of experience and reflection by men who were themselves under the weight of repression, by men whose piety was taken for sedition and whose real tolerance was denounced by parliamentarians and royalists alike. The thought of these men retained a salty sanity and a cool moderation in an era of English history dominated by partisan zeal and sectarian passion. They held intact those foundations of reason, sense, and good humour upon which any worthy society must base its institutions. They provided for England a salutary and impressive example of decency of attitude, gentleness of opposition, and moderate demeanour, at a time when most men and most groups had lost both sense of proportion and direction. They built their edifice of thought soundly and substantially upon traditions of the past which a wise government and far-seeing thinkers had designed in order that the Church of England might preserve the best of an organic past against the divisive future. These men understood both the English temper and that historical gravity which was settling the future of their country. They may be said to have preserved and extended the best in Anglican thought.

The thought of the moderates acquires a peculiar significance and an impressive nobility because it remained dispassionate and objective. The Anglican thinkers of this group did not at any time plead for particular ends while concealing general convictions that lay at variance with their announced aspirations. Nor did they seek to define the Church of England in sectarian terms in order to gain a transitory and unworthy toleration. Rather they seized upon the principle of latitude and moderation, present in Christian thought since the days of Christian Humanism, and gave to it a mature and decisive orientation that solved to the satisfaction of most reasonable men the problems which had harassed the nation so sorely and so long. These men wrote with the dignity and assurance of leaders conscious of the support of dominant opinion. Only rarely does personal discouragement and misfortune tincture a body of thought that was sure, strong, and quietly certain that the accidents of politics do not vitiate the ultimate verities.

The supreme, the almost cruel, test of the temper of moderate Anglican tolerance was imposed by the complete and rushing

triumph of royalism at the time of the Restoration. With unimportant exceptions these thinkers remained unaffected by the raw and heady wine of reaction. The conception of the Church which they had forged had in reality been measured against the ultimate restoration of an Anglicanism which they were certain offered the fairest hope of peace and abiding tolerance in England. Their thought, consequently, was not bent by the emotions and passions inevitably loosed by a reaction so complete that it was itself in a sense revolutionary. These men remained quietly confident that their solution must in due season be embraced, rested confident that their conception of the Church of England was that entertained by the mass of sober and thoughtful Englishmen. The guilt of the Restoration settlement of religion cannot be laid against their reputation.

III

ROMAN CATHOLIC THOUGHT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION, 1640-1660

A. GENERAL NATURE OF ROMAN CATHOLIC THOUGHT IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA

Roman Catholic thought in England was likewise chastened and moderated by the experiences which left the Catholic faith a helpless hostage before a militant and revolutionary Protestantism. We have previously observed that it was but slowly in England that Catholic thought had been softened by the steady erosion of repression and national suspicion to the acceptance of a sectarian status which implicitly repudiated the exclusive pretensions that had been solidified in the Counter-Reformation. Under constant pressure, somewhat isolated from the principal currents of Catholic thought, and after the Elizabethan experience distrustful of Jesuit leadership, English Catholic thought had become insular in character and came gradually to exhibit typical sectarian characteristics.¹ By 1640 the intellectual leadership of English Catholicism had unquestionably passed to the "spiritual group,"² which had sought with honest and convincing effort to differentiate cleanly between the legitimate requirements of their faith and the politico-religious designs of the extremist party which had instilled into the English consciousness a wholly exaggerated opinion of Catholic strength and disloyalty.

The steady and fruitful work of the spiritual party was blighted by the outbreak of the Civil War and by the inevitably complete alliance of Catholicism with the crown during that conflict. No other social or religious group allied itself quite as unreservedly in that struggle as did the Catholics, who, following the collapse of the royalist cause, were left

¹ *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, I, 372-420, and II, 54-114, 169-198, 492-521, for a discussion of the earlier history of Catholic thought.

² *Vide ibid.*, I, 372-420, and II, 492-521, for a fuller consideration of the fissures which necessary historical adaptation had driven through the body of Catholic thought in England.

helpless and dispirited. The humane character of the war and the tolerant convictions which undergirded the Cromwellian government alone prevented a savage wave of religious persecution in England.¹ Since the Catholics were prepared for precisely this martyrdom, the lenient and on the whole just treatment which they received from Cromwell resulted in a decisive change in the general character of Catholic thought. They were never persecuted, though they lived on thin hot soil spreading over a volcano of hatred, suspicion, and fear that threatened to destroy them at any moment. The Catholics were powerfully influenced by the sudden realization that their safety and the survival of their faith in England were dependent on the triumph of religious toleration as a political and religious principle. Hence, as we should expect, the thought of the extremist political group disappears completely during the two revolutionary decades, or was merged in the intransigent royalism that burned so brightly across the Channel. But the larger and more important group that had of necessity to live, work, and survive in England very rapidly embraced the cause of religious liberty with complete enthusiasm. A considerable body of moderate Catholic theory was accordingly evolved which lent distinguished and sincere support to the principles of religious toleration and which broke very sharply with the traditional outlines of Catholic thought.

We have necessarily to treat concisely this interesting and really unexplored body of thought, which merits the careful attention of Catholic historians. The most evident and perhaps the most significant of its aspects was the frank acceptance of a sectarian status by the Catholic apologists. It must be emphasized that this acceptance of reality, which had been slowly developing since the Elizabethan period, at last laid the sure basis for the ultimate toleration of Catholicism in England. The Catholics had abandoned the political aspirations of the extremists and had repudiated both the means and the philosophy which for a full generation had laid the Catholics under the suspicion of treason. Historical myths are dispelled but slowly, however, and the pages of English history were to be blotted

¹ *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 19-20, 31-33, 42, 179-194, for a discussion of governmental policy towards the Catholics from 1640 to 1660.

with needless and cruel suffering before it was finally realized not only that Catholicism was too weak to constitute an effective danger but that the overwhelming majority of the Catholic laity had forsworn the dream of dominance.

Catholic thought during the revolutionary period was generally anonymous and was frequently masked in the guise of sectarian argument, but slightly amplified to include the case of the Romanists. It is not infrequently difficult to distinguish between the Catholic and the sectarian tracts, not only because the Catholic apologists were skilful but because, strange as it may seem, there was actually marked similarity between the two bodies of thought. We have indicated that the spiritual Catholics had accepted a sectarian status, and it should be emphasized that they had likewise adopted *in toto* the sectarian position on religious toleration. Furthermore, many sectaries were pleading the case of Catholic toleration during the period, usually with greater enthusiasm and strength than the Catholic writers dared advance in their own behalf. We are greatly impressed by the distinction and patent sincerity of Catholic thought during the era under survey. The Catholics, like Englishmen at large, had learned much of humility and moderation from the heavy hand of repression and from the harsh tuition of war.

B. THE MATURE CONTRIBUTION OF THE LAY CATHOLICS TO THE THEORY OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

1. *The Humble Petition of the Brownists* (1641)

One of the most interesting of the Catholic apologies for toleration appeared in 1641 and hence must be regarded as one of the earliest pleas for unrestricted religious liberty. Though ostensibly by a Congregationalist, the work was evidently by a Roman Catholic who utilized the as yet unformed structure of Independent thought with effective skill.¹ There

¹ The work, which has usually been regarded as being from the pen of an Independent (St. John, Wallace, *The Contest for Liberty of Conscience in England* [Chicago, 1900], 56-57), greatly disturbed Thomas Edwards, who answered it in his *Reasons against the Independent government*, published in

are many inflexible religious sects in England, the author submitted, each of which strives to secure its own aggrandizement and to perpetrate the destruction of every other communion. The pursuit of this mad and irreligious policy can have no other effect than the ruin of religion and the overthrow of all government unless Parliament resolves "to tolerate all professions whatsoever, every one being left to use his owne conscience, none to be punished or persecuted for it."¹

The adoption of a policy of absolute toleration is counselled by every persuasion of religion and reason. Long and bitter experience has surely shown that men do not embrace religious opinions lightly and that persecution serves no other end than the violation of both judgment and conscience. Religious differences in England have become as deeply rooted as they are numerous. To effect the dominance of any one communion, therefore, will "breede in all a generall discontent, jarring, rayling, libelling, and consequently must needs follow a mighty confusion."² Hence the firm imposition of complete religious toleration upon the warring sects provides the only hope for the restoration of peace in England and for the survival of religion. Furthermore, such a pious and politic action would find instant support in "the good natures and sweet dispositions of our English nation" since all men would realize that the protection of the integrity of their own faith was implicitly bound up in the freedom of other men.

Hence, if the Congregationalists and Puritans feel that they should separate in order to worship in good conscience, they should be encouraged to do so. These men are "great readers of Gods booke, and if they bee in error, they will sooner finde it, having liberty of conscience, then being

the same year. It was almost certainly written by a Catholic. It does not reflect the typical Independent thought of that period, was not printed by any of the printers normally used by the sectaries, and brings the entire argument for toleration to focus upon the Catholic problem. Edwards seems to have suspected that it had been written by a Catholic, but chose to treat it as an Independent pamphlet since it defended incidentally the views of the sect which he held in such violent horror. There are two editions of the tract which show unimportant variations. A third edition, published in the same year, under the title *A new petition of the Papists*, has more important textual differences.

¹ *The humble petition of the Brownists* ([L.], 1641), 1-2.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

oppressed with the tyranny of the High Commission Court or other kindes of persecutions which disquiet their consciences and troubles their patience." But these sects cannot claim a freedom which they decline to extend to all others. Thus if the Socinians insist upon professing nothing save that which natural reason confirms, they must rest their hope of salvation upon reason alone. Similarly, the Catholics should be granted complete liberty of worship and should be permitted to acknowledge the pope as their supreme spiritual head. "Let every religion take what spirituall head they please," the writer urged, "for so they will, whether wee will or no, but the matter imports not, so they obey the king as temporall head, and humbly submit to the state and civil lawes, and live quietly together."¹ Since the very nature of faith requires every man freely to determine the source of religious authority, we may not invade this area of conscience without incurring the guilt of persecution. The papists have maintained their beliefs consistently for more than sixteen centuries and hence stand in no greater danger of damnation than did Christianity during most of its history. The content of their faith involves no other man so long as the Catholics live quietly before the civil laws and loyally before the state.

The author of this remarkable pamphlet pleaded his case well and circumscribed the logic of his argument with no limiting restrictions. Thus he regarded the eccentric sectarianism of the age as a kind of harmless and tolerable rash upon the body of religion. Surely no reasonable man would destroy the vitality of religion in order to extirpate surface and transitory blemishes that occasion no real harm. Consequently he would "let the Adamites preach in vaults and caves as naked as their nailes, and starve themselves with cold, they thinke themselves as innocent as Adam and Eve were in their nakednesse before their fall, let them therefore alone till some innocent Eve bee so curious as to eate forbidden fruit, and then they will all make themselves aprons of figge leaves."² All of the insane and radical sects must be tolerated with charity and good humour. Truth stands exposed to no danger

¹ *New petition of the Papists* [the variant text], 4.

² *Humble petition of the Brownists*, 4.

by the adoption of this policy, and eccentric heresy will cure itself if it parades its views unnoticed and unopposed. Religion will discover in toleration a finer and nobler truth, the state a sounder and more fruitful peace.¹ Experience has adequately demonstrated that compulsion and rigid laws can never secure the triumph of truth. Truth, indeed, can prevail only when error is left free to express itself without molestation. The Christian conscience can advance but one safe rule for the treatment of error, and that is to "leave it alone."²

The principle of toleration, the writer maintained, is implicit in all Christianity, but particularly in Protestantism, which is derived from the assertion of the right of private judgment. The great leaders of Protestant thought in England from Hooker to Ussher have steadily urged the necessity of holding the individual conscience inviolable. The freedom which religion requires is not so much a liberty for error as a liberty for truth to assert itself by the spiritual means with which it is endowed. Errors, we may be sure, will appear, but the "professors of it will be ashamed, it will perish and wither as a flower." In the clear light of liberty men may choose with certainty between that which is spurious and that which is immutably true. This is the liberty which Christ has commanded for the human conscience; this is the freedom which the human spirit requires for its own fulfilment.

The *Humble Petition of the Brownists* argued the cause of toleration with distinction and with pithy reasonableness. The writer, in order to include the Roman Catholics within the sphere of liberty, widened the compass of his argument to its logical and complete limits. And there is every indication that his plea was completely sincere. Men who have been under the lash of repression, who have observed the disastrous effects of sectarian rigidity, are quite willing to submit the faith which they steadfastly regard as true to the ultimate test that toleration imposes. Such men come to realize that persecution is armed with fear and the desire for dominance, while truth has nothing to fear from the free trial of faith against faith. This persuasion came to tincture Catholic thought deeply directly it was realized that Roman Catholicism was a weak minority communion in

¹ *Humble petition of the Brownists*, 5.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

England without even a remote hope for dominance. Under these circumstances, therefore, Catholicism rapidly began to exhibit a temper and to develop a thought which were typically sectarian.

2. *A Moderate and Safe Expedient* (1646)

This sense of minority status broke with heavy impact upon the Catholics in 1646-1647. They had risked their future safety upon an indissoluble alliance with a now defeated king and they had to face a future made dark and ominous by the almost congenital hatred of a militant and triumphant Protestantism. The Catholics could not as yet know that they would find protection and tolerable security under an administration inspired by sincere devotion to the principles of religious liberty. They only knew in 1646 that "their estates had been sequestered; their priests had been driven beyond the frontiers; they had been compelled to take an awful oath of abjuration; their families had been broken up; and in the year of the parliamentary triumph four of their priests had been executed as a hideous warning that the exercise of Catholic devotions would be tolerated in England no more."¹ The frightful danger in which the Catholics stood for rather more than two years powerfully implemented the development of a mature body of tolerant thought in the communion and hastened the frank acceptance of a sectarian status by their responsible leaders. The instinct of survival works strange wonders indeed in philosophy.

A very important pamphlet, *A Moderate and Safe Expedient*, published in 1646, reflects at once the terrible fear which gripped the Catholics and the hope that some measure of toleration might be gained by the unequivocal acceptance of the status of a weak minority sect. The author pointed out that though the penal laws against the Catholics were severe, they did not pretend to seek the conversion of the Romanists. It has been generally recognized that "conversion in matter of religion, if it be forced, should give little satisfaction to a wise state of the fidelity of such convertites, for those who for

¹ Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 180.

worldly respects will breake their faith with God" will not scruple at breaking faith with men.¹ Hence it may be said that the penal legislation has none save a civil purpose. The state has raised these repressive measures solely in the interests of its own safety. But it is evident that these laws have not had the desired effect of removing fear and hence they should be most carefully considered in the interests of social and political stability. One course would be to grant the Catholics freedom of faith as has been done with beneficent results in Holland, in order to separate sharply the religious conscience of the Catholic subject from his civil obligations. This would unquestionably be the most desirable solution, but the writer evidently had no hope that it lay within the realm of political probability.²

But still another solution suggests itself which will relieve England of groundless fears and which will free the Catholics of the burden of a repression which they regard as persecution. They should be encouraged and assisted to emigrate as a body rather than to "continue here obnoxious." The author argued carefully and subtly that they must be permitted to emigrate as free Englishmen and that they should not fare beyond the ambit of English institutions and possessions. They should be permitted to dispose of their estates before departing in order to arm themselves with the means necessary for colonization and, quite as importantly, to preserve English prestige against the accusation "that the lawes here against recusants were made . . . for lucre only, and not for advancing the gospel."³ Furthermore, the Catholics should be encouraged to settle in an English dominion in order to increase commerce, augment the customs, and strengthen the defences of the colonies. The colony of Maryland, which has traditionally granted Catholics freedom of conscience, suggests itself as ideally suited for this colonizing purpose.⁴ The advantages

¹ *A moderate and safe expedient to remove jealousies and feares, of any danger, or prejudice to this state, by the Roman Catholicks of this kingdome, etc.* (n.pl., 1646), 10.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ The charter for the colony of Maryland was granted to Lord Baltimore, a Roman Catholic, in 1632, the first settlements being undertaken in the same year. Religious toleration, promised from the beginning, was formally guaranteed by the Toleration Act passed by the Colonial Assembly in 1649.

would be very great indeed for England. She would be relieved of the danger from Catholic powers that have long resented the treatment accorded to Romanists and would in consequence be in a much stronger diplomatic position. The gratitude of the emigrating Catholics would ensure their continued loyalty to the mother country. Since the number of recusants is not large, the loss in population would not seriously impair the strength of the nation and would certainly be more than offset by an increase in trade.¹ A constant source of apprehension would be removed from English politics, and the distant loyalty of the Catholic colonists would gradually heal the bitterness engendered by differences of faith.

Nor can it be reasonably maintained that a Catholic colony in Maryland would seriously endanger the larger and stronger plantations in Virginia and in New England. The Catholic colony would be flanked on either side by far more populous and growing Protestant foundations which would provide additional assurances of loyalty. In fact, the author estimated that there were already three times as many Protestant settlers in America as there were Roman Catholics left in England.² The Catholic colony would remain devotedly English and Virginia's control of the mouth of Chesapeake Bay would gain for her considerable economic benefits. In every sense, therefore, the assisted emigration of the Catholics would redound to the profit and strength of England. The plantation would make it sure that "a tender conscience shal not be violenced, a suspected party will be removed, and unity in this nation the more confirmed, an increase of the dominion of the crown acquired; and, with these, the end of all those laws against recusants."³

This poignant plea, which so bravely masks stark terror and complete despondency with calm and careful reasoning, affords to the historian a clear and valuable insight into the workings of the harassed mind of the Roman Catholics in England following the collapse of the cause upon which they

¹ *Moderate and safe expedient*, 13.

² The writer employed his statistical argument very loosely indeed. The consensus of historical opinion seems to be that there were in 1646 not upwards of 35,000 English colonists in North America.

³ *Moderate and safe expedient*, 8.

had injudiciously staked their future. They expected, and sought by emigration to escape, a holocaust which they could not know was reserved for a different faith in a later century. It is a bitter reflection indeed that these pathetic negotiations for escape, the desperate efforts of men to flee from a consuming wrath, have for the historian in these later days more than the cool interest which the motives and passions of antiquity usually inspire.

3. JOHN AUSTIN, 1613-1669

The English Catholics had, however, overestimated the vindictive wrath of a victorious Puritanism and had underestimated the remarkable tolerance which was to dominate the political policy of the Commonwealth and Protectorate. The spiritual party—and this now included almost all English Catholics—had completely repudiated the political pretensions of the missionary group and had, indeed, abandoned all support of large reaches of the doctrine of papal supremacy. They had discovered that the hope of future security in England lay in accepting an inconspicuous sectarian role and in lending firm and sincere devotion to the cause of religious toleration. The Roman Catholic contribution to the development of the theory of religious toleration became mature and significant in the important *Christian Moderator: or, Persecution for Religion Condemned*, published pseudonymously by John Austin,¹ a Catholic lawyer. This work, which was published

¹ Austin was a native of Walpole, Norfolk. He was educated at Cambridge, where he remained until 1640, when he was obliged to leave the University because of his conversion to Catholicism. He later studied law at Lincoln's Inn but his religion and the civil disturbances of the period prevented him from entering upon active practice. He supported himself for some years as a tutor in the family of Walter Fowler of Staffordshire, returning to London in 1650. (Gillow, Joseph, *A Literary and Biographical History, or Bibliographical Dictionary of the English Catholics, etc.* [L., 1885-1902], I, 88-89.) Perhaps the ablest of the Catholic apologists of this period, his home was renowned as a centre for the Romanist intellectuals. He visited France in 1658 (*S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, 1657-1658, p. 554) and we gather from numerous references in his works that he had in his earlier years travelled extensively. His *Devotions*, published in 1669, were frequently reprinted and in course of time became by adoption a Protestant manual. A man of temperate and noble character, a keen and discriminating thinker, Austin deserves a full study by some Catholic historian.

in three parts between 1651 and 1653, was ostensibly from the pen of an Independent, but no real effort was made to disguise the religious sympathies of the author. Rather it appears that Austin chose to write as an Independent because he could best bring the now mature sweep of sectarian theory to the solid support of the cause of Roman Catholic toleration by basing his argument upon the Independent point of view. Austin wrote forcibly, and his closely knit reasoning was skilfully extended to lengths which must have left many of the Independents a little giddy. The work is impressive in its sobriety and is soundly constructive in its analysis of the Catholic problem. The cool detachment with which Austin treats the delicate issues involved bears indirect but eloquent testimony to the healing benefit of Cromwell's policy of administering the penal laws against the Catholics with justice and humanity.

Austin submitted that the Civil War had been waged to secure forever the principle that the religious conscience must remain free from all coercive restraint. This dictum, so obvious in religion, has now become axiomatic in politics as well. But such a principle of liberty, unless it be universally applied, has neither philosophical validity nor assurance of permanency. Any compulsion upon conscience therefore restores the tyranny from which England has so recently escaped and convicts of an incredible hypocrisy those who have pleaded and fought so valiantly in the name of tolerance. All Englishmen must now agree that when we compel any man in religion we destroy his reason, the essential element of his being. To what purpose, Austin demanded, "do we preach poor souls into just so much liberty of scripture, as may beget their torture, and not permit them to rest where they finde satisfaction; either prohibit to search at all, or leave us sensible of some benefit by searching; to believe what appears untrue, seems to mee impossible; to profess what we believe untrue, I am sure is damnable."¹

¹ Birchley, William (i.e., Austin, John), *The Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned, by the light of nature, law of God, evidence of our own principles* (part i, L., 1651; part ii, L., 1652; part iii, L., 1653), i, 2. We have used the second edition (L., 1653) which was somewhat enlarged, with the three parts bound together, but with separate pagination. There has been considerable bibliographical confusion concerning this rare and valuable work.

Hence any degree of persecution or compulsion in religion destroys the very nature of faith and makes a mockery of the principle of religious liberty. England has been compelled, almost against her will, to realize that the individual is ultimately the sovereign unit in religion, and to recognize that no frame of doctrine or discipline can be established which denies to him the full scope of personal religious freedom. The Christian is confronted by a wilderness of authority in which sect after sect raises the pretentious banner of exclusive truth. But the arrogant claims of absolute truth are weakened and destroyed by the very variety which truth exhibits. England, like Christianity in general, has therefore no choice but to recognize and legalize the spiritual autonomy of the individual man.

England has at last gripped tenaciously the saving principle of religious liberty. But this beneficent principle will have no meaning and no certain guarantee of perpetuity unless it is extended to all species of dissent. The sturdy support of religious liberty by the army won all England to the popular cause, and its victory has opened up for the nation at large a magnificent vista of peace and religious vitality. All communions must now patiently wait "till the Lord be pleased to take off the vail from their hearts that are otherwise minded," when they may at last submit the truth of their beliefs to the test of reason and sound judgment.¹ The good sense of common men has triumphed in England, thereby securing religious liberty and peace of conscience for all. The innumerable petitions that have been presented to Parliament and the warm support of the army are sufficient proof that England desires this liberty of the soul above even her political freedom. All men who are upright in their conduct, tender in their consciences, and peaceable in their dispositions should be beneficiaries in a rich and permanent inheritance.

Only one restriction of consequence has been imposed upon liberty of conscience, Austin maintained, and that in itself gravely endangers the integrity of the principle which the government is pledged to uphold. For those Romanists who have lived quietly and who serve the state with loyalty likewise

¹ [Austin], *Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned*, i, 6.

merit the full benefits of religious freedom. These too are religious men who adhere to the same fundamentals of faith that bind all Christians to Christ. They read the same Bible, worship the same God, rest the hope of their redemption in the same Christ, and lend obedience to the same moral law. Surely such men may "reasonably be suffered to live in their native country with the peaceable enjoyment of their consciences in their private houses, especially those who will quietly submit to such cautions and restrictions, as the common-wealth shall require for prevention of scandall, or disturbance of the publick peace."¹ England's boast that she has attained religious liberty will be nothing more than a hollow and impious mockery until measures have been taken which secure freedom for the Catholic as well as the Protestant conscience.

Austin proved his case by a grim enumeration of the priests who had been put to death in England since the outbreak of the Civil War, with the indication that at least six others had died in prison.² In particular, he argued that the most recent of these executions, in May, 1651, gravely endangered the government's announced policy of religious liberty.³ Neither the letter nor the spirit of the principle of religious liberty can be seriously strained without endangering the entire structure of the religious settlement in England. Can it be, he enquired, that the Independents will "think it reasonable to be their own interpreters, and consequently intend by this charming sound of liberty, an absolute and uncontrollable freedom indeed, but to be enjoyed by none, but themselves"?⁴

¹ [Austin], *Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned*, ii, 7.

² Austin's list seems to be remarkably accurate and must have been based upon sources of information not easily available. He lists twenty priests who had been put to death between 1641 and 1651, of whom nineteen were executed prior to 1647. His calendar is in substantial agreement with the estimates we have previously made (Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, III, 33, 180-181, 185), save that he adds two and omits one on the list we have prepared. Accepting his additions, which present research does not confirm, the total number of priests executed during the period of the Civil War would stand at twenty-two. These men were of course charged with treason and were actually victims of war hysteria. Only one priest, Southworth, was put to death during the Cromwellian period (*ibid.*, III, 185).

³ [Austin], *Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned*, ii, 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, i, 27.

This can scarcely be the case, because the very meaning of the recent war and the philosophy of sectarianism have enshrined religious freedom as the bulwark of the new England.

Austin agreed that the question of Roman Catholic toleration raised problems and aroused antipathies which involved difficulties even for a tolerant government. But England errs in measuring the state and temper of the present Catholics in terms of the fanaticism and rebellious activities of some Catholics a generation earlier. Since the Catholics have never enjoyed peace and tolerance, they will for that reason be firmly bound to any government which extends to them a reasonable freedom of conscience. Certainly they, a weak and unorganized party, have not been as grievous a danger to the revolutionary government as the irreconcilable Presbyterians whom every effort has been taken to conciliate.¹ It is true that many Catholics supported the king, but so did many Englishmen. There were numerous Catholics, indeed, who fled to the king for no other reason than to secure protection against their neighbours or from the early excesses of the parliamentary army.²

England actually has nothing to fear from those Catholics who display their loyalty towards the government, and the gradual extension of liberty to them is the most certain means by which that loyalty may be perpetuated. Nor can Protestant England ever hope to secure the conversion of the Romanists until persuasion and reasonable argument have replaced the gibbet.³ Such repressive measures as the oath of abjuration have no civil content;⁴ they do no more than wrack the consciences of Christian men. Certainly it may be said that "this is a sad consequence of wresting the inward perswasion of poore soules from that belief, which their own conscience tells them is truth, thereby making them lesse carefull of their owne salvation, and their honesty and credit of lesse

¹ [Austin], *Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned*, ii, 9-10.

² *Ibid.*, ii, 12.

³ *Ibid.*, ii, 21-22.

⁴ Austin made an impressive attack on the oath of abjuration on the reasonable ground that it was framed for no other reason than to secure the persecution of the sectaries by the bishops. The oath can be designated by no other term than persecution since it seeks to compel a man to renounce the actual tenets of his faith and is evidently designed to search out beliefs held in conscience. (*Ibid.*, i, 20.)

reputation, even with those, who force them to this change."¹ In the early days of the Reformation some curbs upon the Romanists were necessary, since they were strong and militant. But they are now weak, divided, and impoverished. The repression which still weighs upon them can be dignified by no other name than persecution.²

These facts must be appreciated by an England that is exploring new horizons of tolerance. The case of the Roman Catholics must be objectively considered as a strictly religious problem. Above all it must be recalled that the Catholics too are Christians, that their faith is nourished by the historical root from which Protestantism itself has sprung. Austin, in order to press his plea for the Catholics, made skilful use of the generally entertained belief that the limits of toleration must be at least as broad as the fundamentals of faith. The Romanists should be permitted complete freedom of worship so long as they profess the essentials of Christian belief, which all admit is the case, until they have incurred the guilt of some overt action against the public peace. Catholics likewise have souls and consciences; they too may walk uprightly before God. England stands at the threshold of a great and beneficent advance towards a finer and more settled national life. Only the insensate hatred of the Catholics, only an historical myth that no longer possesses the substance of reality, beclouds the vision of tolerance in the nation. When ugly survivals of traditional intolerance have finally been swept away by a better understanding and a purer charity, "surely there would in time grow society, commerce, and mutuall confidence, and so frequent opportunities of clearer information; when once all jealousies and misunderstandings of one another shall be laid aside, the differences amongst Christians will soon be reconciled, if not to an absolute and precise unity of faith and doctrine, yet at least to a blessed union of peace and love."³

No valid reason either in policy or in religion, Austin concluded, can be raised against the extension of complete religious liberty to the Catholics. They adhere to all the

¹ [Austin], *Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned*, ii, 18.

² *Ibid.*, ii, 23.

³ *Ibid.*, i, 24.

fundamentals of faith and their so-called heresies are but variations on non-fundamental doctrines and practices. They are Englishmen who have abided quietly under grievous repression through many years in order to give invincible proof of their loyalty to the nation of which they are citizens. They have repudiated in thought as well as in action those papal pretensions which are related to politics rather than to the marrow of faith.¹ Of all the many sects in England the Romanists are without question the most harmless and defenceless; they are persecuted simply from habit which no longer enjoys any basis in reason or policy. It must be conceded that "great security and advantages would accrue to this nation, by treating in mercy all peaceable papists . . . the pope would be deprived of that specious pretext of relieving his distressed flock"; greater tolerance for persecuted Protestants abroad could at once be secured; the danger of factions at home would be diminished; and, above all else, the fair structure of English tolerance would at last stand complete.²

Austin argued his case well, carefully setting the frame of his logic in grooves of thought now worn deep in English public opinion. The case which he submitted was indeed unassailable so long as the English Catholics stood prepared to hinge their liberty upon the predication of civil loyalty. A careful study of the Cromwellian era indicates that Cromwell and sectarian opinion generally had likewise arrived at this conclusion, and it must be said that the Roman Catholics during these years merited the trust imposed in them by a revolutionary government. Cromwell, in point of fact, went much farther in this direction than English public opinion could be induced to follow. His policy towards the Romanists, while firm, was just, equable, and, above all else, predictable. Roman Catholicism learned during these years that the price of its liberty lay in the full acceptance of a minority status and consequently in the repudiation of exclusive pretensions which had come to frighten England whether advanced by injudicious prelates, fanatical sectaries, grimly orthodox Scots, or nostalgic Catholics.

¹ [Austin], *Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned*, i, 15-16.

² *Ibid.*, i, 18.

4. *ENGLANDS SETTLEMENT* (1659)

Roman Catholic thought on the subject of religious toleration attained maturity during the years when the Lord Protector was, in the face of almost insuperable difficulties, giving to England a large measure of religious freedom by carefully calculated administrative policy. The Catholics, quite as much as other religious groups in England, were persuaded that some such policy must be engrafted into law if England were to be spared another disruptive struggle like the one through which she had so recently passed. On the eve of the Restoration a very impressive work was published anonymously, under the title *Englands Settlement, upon the Two Solid Foundations of the Peoples Civil and Religious Liberties*, which stressed with careful reasoning the necessity of firmly securing religious toleration in any permanent political settlement and which raised the quality of Roman Catholic thought on the subject of religious liberty from frightened sectarian pleading to seasoned philosophical conviction.¹ This tract supplies still more evidence for the view that most of the religious communions in England, as well as the overwhelming mass of lay opinion, supported the restoration of the monarchy in the conviction that religious freedom could best be preserved in a stable and traditional government. There were very few men left in England in 1660 who had not learned the lesson which rival bigotries, clashing sects, and militant orthodoxies had impressed upon a now harassed and disillusioned nation. England restored the House of Stuart naïvely unaware that a violent reaction, essentially political in its nature, must occur in religion even under the most irreligious of all her sovereigns.

The author of *Englands Settlement* vigorously denounced the coercion of conscience under whatever pretence as inimical to religion and destructive to the very foundations of social security. He drew upon a considerable literature now available for the brief of his argument against religious persecution.

¹ We have been unable to discover any clues concerning the authorship of this remarkable pamphlet. The argument, certain habits of phrasing, and the general point of view would indicate that it was almost certainly from the pen of a Roman Catholic.

Christ has reserved the judgment of conscience to Himself, and it was His earnest warning that nothing is more inherently vital to Christianity than the inviolability of the human soul. The power which the magistrate has from time to time arrogated in religion is insupportable and impious whether it is exercised by a Christian or a pagan ruler. The fact that a ruler calls himself Christian or that a dominant religious party avers that it teaches an exclusive truth, may well prove dominance, but it constitutes no evidence of truth. The slightest coercive authority in religion delivers up Christianity to political chance and plunges the world into a barbarous struggle for sectarian dominance. Under these conditions the test of truth becomes naked power, and "every one that has the power will persecute another, the papists may persecute the protestants, the protestants the papists, and the protestants one another."¹ The Christian world has learned in the tragic school of experience that these are the inevitable fruits of the persecuting philosophy.

Moreover, the employment of force in spiritual causes is quite as injurious to religion as to society. It serves no object save to make weak men liars and dissemblers. The true end of religion is to win the reasonable assent of men, "which assent must proceed from inward illumination of God, and externall instruction of men."² Persecution, whether it be brutal or subtle, violates the essential nature of faith and debilitates those agencies which the Church must use for the propagation of Christ's Gospel. We should recall that Christianity was for many years a despised minority sect which prevailed spiritually against dominant religions armed with every weapon of persecution. It is strange indeed that directly Christianity attained dominance it adopted the brutal and ineffectual weapons so recently used against it. This unhappy history has just been recapitulated in England by the coercion which a triumphant sectarianism has imposed upon the Anglicans and the Catholics. Surely if these "zelots were sure of the truth on their side, as the ancient Christians were, they would be also

¹ *Englands settlement, upon the two solid foundations of the peoples civil and religious liberties, etc.* (L., 1659), 12.

² *Ibid.*, 14.

confident of the victory in a calme and Christian way, without any force or compulsion."¹

It would seem, indeed, that Christianity has become infected with a deadly virus which none of the sects that comprise it can quite throw off. Thus Protestantism should be regarded as a revolt against the papal pretensions to infallibility and an absolute religious authority, yet it has itself fallen into the sin which it not long since so vigorously denied. Basing itself upon the fallibility of human knowledge, it none the less seeks an exclusive and infallible dominion. Its militant zeal should be restrained by the reflection that "we cannot rationally persecute any man for his conscience, unlesse we do not only know that he is in an errour but also be infallibly sure that we are bringing him to an undoubted truth."² This presumptuous claim Protestantism at last has been constrained to disown and has thereby cut away the moral and intellectual grounds for coercion. Hence the restraints which have been levied against the free exercise of the Catholic faith in England have no religious justification whatsoever. England proposes "not any one religion to the recusants to be followed by them, but . . . we hold them out a medley of all the religions and new sects among us, that they may put out their hands and blindly choose or draw out any of them."³

This argument was soundly based and skilfully extended. Persecution must under any circumstance be condemned as a moral wrong and as wholly ineffective for the accomplishment of the purpose to which it is dedicated. But it possesses not even reasonable justification in Protestantism, which has vindicated itself only by the denial of the sources of authority from which persecution must flow. The destruction of catholicity and the consequent development of numerous exclusive systems of truth has had the effect of placing the responsibility of choice squarely upon the individual. Hence religious coercion has become an absurd as well as impious cruelty and, as recent European developments have shown, an intolerable danger to the peace and well-being of mankind. Religious toleration, which the nature of faith requires, likewise happens to be an immediate and urgent social necessity.

¹ *Englands settlement*, 17.

² *Ibid.*, 18.

³ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

The author then turned to an admirably thoughtful consideration of the necessity of religious toleration as a cure for the divisive and destructive effects of religious hatred and internecine war inspired by criminally irresponsible spiritual ambition. He argued bluntly that the Civil War and the disruptive history of the revolutionary experiment had been the final fruit of an intolerant struggle of several religious groups for dominance in the nation.¹ "When any party was under the lash, then they cry'd for compassion on tender consciences, and inveighed against all coercive power . . . but they no sooner snatcht the whip into their own hands, then they presently laid about them without any compassion of their brethren, or any memory of their own former condition."² A dangerous and eroding struggle for power has been disguised in religious terms and in pious protestations of exclusive truth. No state can long endure the strain imposed by claims of catholicity in a nation irretrievably divided into several hostile religious communions. The nostalgia for an older society must be abandoned; the state will never gain stability or restore an enduring civil peace until it imposes religious toleration upon all the sects of which it is comprised. This is a necessary act of sovereignty, which happens, at the same time, to be a beneficent religious action.

This end is the prime consideration which must determine the English decision in the restoration of a stable government. The form of that government is quite unimportant so long as the fundamentals of religious and civil liberty are firmly incorporated into the law and constitution of the state. The nation must finally resolve that "no person professing faith in Christ be molested or oppressed in his conscience for his judgment in matters of religion, or in things meerly relating to the worship and service of God."³ This is the decision towards which England has been groping during the Civil War and the Protectorate, though the revolutionary governments have been too weakly based to secure complete spiritual liberty. England has spoken clearly and firmly on this issue. A flood of books, papers, and petitions have attested to the universal desire to found the state upon the impregnable rock

¹ *Englands settlement*, 3.

² *Ibid.*, 3-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

of religious toleration. All men in England "whose inconsiderate zeal does not weigh down their wits, do see with the parliament . . . that the government of these nations . . . cannot be . . . settled without taking away of all restraint over mens consciences, and granting an innocent toleration."¹ This conviction, which has matured so rapidly, must be regarded as the surviving fruit of the Civil War.

Legal toleration will of necessity constitute the foundation of the modern state. Religious variety continues constantly to expand and will probably be permanently characteristic of the modern world. The state must adapt itself to the gravity of this momentous historical change. Men have learned to prize freedom of conscience as their most precious possession and will revolt with explosive power when any systematic effort is made to limit their just liberty. Consequently "that state which puts a restraint upon mens consciences, especially when variety of religions has got a footing in it, can never be well and solidly settled."² It is therefore of the greatest importance that Christians of every persuasion should unite in resolute and eternal resistance to any effort to impose upon the nation an exclusive religious establishment which seeks to implement its strength by coercive practices.³ One terrible war has been waged upon this issue and no government can ever survive which does not obey the mandate that history has so clearly given. He who wields the sovereign power in England will remember, as he is wise, that one government in the nation was brought low and destroyed by a weak and despised sect which might have been held in loyal obedience by the concession of a religious toleration to which it was in justice entitled.⁴

All Europe has learned slowly and painfully from the tragedy of civil conflict and virulent national wars that religious toleration must be embraced as an axiom of modern politics. France was all but destroyed before sheer exhaustion contrived a tolerant solution suggested by charity and religion at the outset. Holland was in a state of terror and ruin until religious liberty provided the basis upon which an enduring peace and an amazing prosperity could be built. This Protestant nation has given

¹ *Englands settlement*, 9.

² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

the Catholics a reasonable freedom which they have repaid in the coin of loyalty.¹ Unwavering devotion to a policy of unlimited religious freedom must undergird that state which would emerge from the barbarism of persecution and internal strife into the light of peace, prosperity, and stability. That end, towards which wise and pious men have struggled for the eternal benefit of religion, politics have imposed upon the western world as a condition of survival.

5. THE MINOR ROMAN CATHOLIC THEORISTS

a. Profession of political loyalty

The English Catholics used every possible occasion to implement their plea for toleration by professions of absolute loyalty to the civil state. In so doing they emphasized the fact that they were patriotic Englishmen as well as Catholics, and vigorously repudiated those papal pretensions which had wrought such previous harm upon their communion in England and which had raised up an implacable public hostility against them. They sought to show that the occasion for public suspicion of Catholic loyalty had long since passed and that the lay Catholics in England were being persecuted for seditious acts of the historical past which the spiritual group had disavowed without reservation.

The coercion which the dominant Protestant party has exercised against the Catholics is by admission contrary to the basic precepts of the Reformation, it was suggested, and was clearly developed as a political policy designed to restrain a powerful and militant Catholic communion during the early and uncertain days of the Elizabethan Establishment. Every loyal Catholic will admit that this policy was in its early application both prudent and necessary for the government.² All faithful Catholics would agree that the restraints then levied against their faith were designed not to violate con-

¹ *Englands settlement*, II, 30.

² *A dialogue or discourse betweene a parliament-man and a Roman-Catholick, touching the present state of recusants in England* ([L.], 1641), 3-5.

science but to crush sedition. Inevitably the "extraordinary proceedings from the See of Rome," the dynastic plots centering around Mary, Queen of Scots, and the insane treason of the Gunpowder Plot cast a suspicion upon the loyalty of all Catholics which required the government to protect itself.¹ It must be confessed, another Catholic writer submitted, that "this severity sprang not only from the motives of state and policie, current in those times, but was much exasperated by the rigorous proceedings of the Court of Rome."²

These are historical facts which every Catholic must admit. Religious zeal was not unmixed with treason in the days when an inflamed missionary faction endangered the very existence of the Catholic faith in England by fantastic and seditious plots for which the great mass of loyal Catholics paid with their sufferings. The English Catholics, however, are now a weak minority group who have firmly disavowed the insupportable plots of the earlier extremists. Catholic treason bears no more organic relation to the Catholic faith than does the treason of Protestants to the nature of the reformed religion. The English lay Catholics have expressly repudiated every papal position which endangers sovereignty and stand staunchly united in loyal devotion to England, "let schoolmen in their speculations dispute what they please."³ The Catholics of this later age are being punished for the sins and treasons of men long since dead, or for "supposed errorrs of our understanding and beliefe, which [are] . . . an effect immediate of grace, and therefore not to be enforced."⁴

In order further to clarify their position some fifty leading Catholic gentlemen were reported to have subscribed to a sweeping repudiation of papal authority in order to establish in public confidence a basis of trust which would permit the extension of toleration to the Catholics. They argued that the pope enjoyed no power to absolve any person from his due

¹ *To the honourable, the knights, citizens and burgesses of the Commons House in Parliament now assembled. The humble petition of the lay-Catholiques recusants of England* (L., 1641), s.sh.

² *A dialogue or discourse*, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ *To the . . . Parliament now assembled. The humble petition of the lay-Catholiques*, s.sh.

civil obedience nor to command any illegal action against a person or government deemed to be heretical.¹ The Roman Catholics somewhat later expressly limited the jurisdiction of the pope to those matters concerned with faith.² They pleaded that the religious situation in England had so far matured and the loyalty of the generality of Catholics had been so minutely tested that they merited a large degree of religious freedom. "Let but your poore Catholicke subjects live quietly amongst you," one apologist pleaded; "seeke not the totall ruine of their families, spill not the blood of your Christian brethren, be but pleased to use your clemency, and graciously connive at their subsistence."³ The Catholics will generously repay this measure of trust by complete civil loyalty as they are Englishmen, by quiet and inconspicuous piety as they are Christians.⁴

b. The argument of civil stability

The minor Catholic thinkers, like the more important apologists for their faith, made effective use of the argument that irreconcilable differences in faith compelled the adoption of a policy of religious toleration in England. This fact has been generally recognized in most Western European countries after a terrible propitiation of blood. "Soul immunity," one writer elegantly if vaguely argued, "conaturally infers a conscientious fidelity" which will "imprint indelible character of duty to be transmitted even to posterity."⁵ The stern facts of statecraft must be recognized by a Parliament which is responsible for the peace and well-being of a nation composed of men of many creeds.⁶ It is the task of government most carefully to assess the great benefits which will flow from a general toleration, despite the zealous demands of fanatics

¹ H., T., *Articles proposed to the Catholiques of England, etc.* ([Paris], 1648).

² B., A., *A letter to the honourable Collonel Okey member of Parliament; and his honoured and worthy friends Collonel Biscoe, Colonel Salmon, and Lieut. Collonel Allen, communicating to them another letter written by T.F. to a person of condition, perswading to a toleration of popery* (L., 1659), 9.

³ *A dialogue or discourse*, 7.

⁴ *To the . . . Parliament now assembled. The humble petition of the lay-Catholiques*, s.sh.

⁵ B., A., *Letter to . . . Collonel Okey*, 7. ⁶ *A dialogue or discourse*, 7 ff.

blind to the realities of the modern world. The spontaneous revolt of determined men against religious tyranny provoked a civil war in England which can never be ended until a universal liberty in religion has been attained.¹ The spiritual dominance of any one party has been very short in England since the Reformation and it should now be patent that no stability can be secured until the ideal of religious uniformity shall be abandoned as a principle of politics. Common prudence should counsel all men to "provide for the like vicissitudes . . . in case our own issue shall differ in opinion, from the future prevailing doctrines, for among so many sects, none of us can tell, which shall at last get and keep the chair."²

These Catholic writers urged, cumulative evidence would indicate, sincerely, the abandonment of a principle which lay at the heart of the Roman Catholic conception of institutional religious life. They not only indicated their own frank willingness to accept a minority, a sectarian, status, but expressly disowned those important areas of orthodox Catholic theory which make the philosophical acceptance of religious toleration impossible. The thought of the lay Catholics became in this period very closely merged with that of the Protestant sects with whom they were exposed to common danger. The English Catholics realized far better than the ecclesiastical statesmen in Rome or the doctors across the Channel that the very fact of their survival was inextricably linked with the triumph of the principles of religious liberty. The harsh compulsion of fact inevitably secures in history the necessary accommodation of theory. Thus it came about that the Roman Catholics were to make during the revolutionary decades a substantial contribution to the theory of toleration and were partially at least to persuade a vengeful and suspicious England that the toleration of their faith was politically possible.

c. The plea for toleration

The Catholic writers argued with effective logic that their communion could not be excluded from the benefits of religious liberty without the destruction of the principle itself. It is

¹ B., A., *Letter to . . . Collonel Okey*, 8.

² *Ibid.*, 8-9

certain that no valid religious reason can be advanced which would permit the persecution of the ancient faith on spiritual grounds. Religion is purely a matter of the spirit, and the Church must eschew all violent courses in its maintenance and propagation.¹ The English Protestant communions can gain permanent security for themselves only by ensuring that freedom to the Catholics as well.² When this has been done the issue of religion will be subjected to the trial of truth which every party professes to desire but which few seek to bring to pass. It may be confidently said that "all persecution for religion is cleerly repugnant to the principles of freedome, so often and so solemnly declared by the Parliament and army, and now universally received by all the moderate and well-temper'd people of this nation."³ Of this the Catholics are convinced, quite as much as is Protestant England. Religious toleration imposes many obligations of civility, humility, and charity upon those who are its beneficiaries, and this the Catholics, chastened by a century of repression, fully understand. The cause of tolerance has nothing to fear from the lay Catholics.

The English Catholics can be accused of no offence save devoted adherence to a faith which the entire nation professed for a full millennium. Theirs is a faith of constancy which does not outrage the social and civil quiet by eccentric changes and ever-shifting doctrines. They are what they are because education and environment have made them so, and "perswasions of that kind, as by degrees they sink into the heart, so gently by degrees they are to be removed."⁴ The English Catholics share with their Protestant brethren an intense hatred of the methods of the Inquisition which accomplishes nothing save the attainment of a bestial conformity. They do not desire

¹ B., A., *Letter to . . . Collonel Okey*, 4.

² *No Papist nor Presbyterian: but the modest desires and proposalls of some well-affected and free-born people: offered to the Generall Councell of the armie, etc.* ([L.], 1649), 3-4.

³ *Some few motives, why Roman Catholiques should not be forced out of their consciences by penalties imposed upon them meerly for religion* ([1652]), in [Austin], *Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned*, ii, 27. Austin says that this was the substance of a petition "of late" presented to Parliament by the lay leaders of the Catholic communion.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ii, 28.

ROMAN CATHOLIC THOUGHT

to erect courts for the trial of conscience which destroy the soul and invade the very precincts of God's omnipotence.¹ They desire nothing else than tolerance and the right to become free Englishmen once more. For too long they have laboured under the stigma of suspicion and have groaned under repressions which have made them not "free-borne people, and English natives, but rather aliens, outlaws or men bar'd of all propriety of persons and goods," who have been wafted to and fro in a ceaseless ebb and flow of religious and political change. Men who have patiently borne their afflictions for so long have earned the freedom of the Englishman and the precious liberty of the Christian.

The Catholics sought in numerous petitions and privately circulated memoranda to evolve a satisfactory formula for the toleration of their faith. They had endeavoured to show that the lay Catholics merited religious freedom as Englishmen of undoubted loyalty and as Christians of quiet and pious constancy. This toleration they had demonstrated to be necessary for the attainment of enduring civil peace in the nation and essential to the permanent solution of the problem of religious diversity. History has abundantly proved that Protestants and Catholics may live together in peace under one government so long as an equal and complete legal toleration is afforded to both.² But the peace and spiritual freedom which all men in England desire can never be certainly attained until the circumference of Protestant charity has been so far enlarged as to include the loyal and peaceable Romanists. "The causes of imposing penalties upon Catholiques being now wholly ceased, they humbly hope it cannot be thought too great a boldnesse in their duty to petition a readmittance to the common rights as free-born English men; since there is neither any Catholique competitor for the crown, nor any such detestable conspiracy, as some few of their religion have been formerly guilty of."³

¹ B., A., *Letter to . . . Collonel Okey*, 6.

² *To the honourable the committee for propagation of the gospel, the humble proposals of the Roman Catholicks* ([1652]), in [Austin], *Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned*, ii, 30.

³ *Some few motives*, in [Austin], *Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned*, ii, 28.

Hence the Catholics proposed that no penalty whatsoever be laid upon any man for a difference of religious judgment.¹ To this end all the penal legislation, reared against the Catholics, but by interpretation designed to repress any dissenting conscience, should be formally swept from the statute book.² The resolution legally to ensure religious liberty should be further implemented by positive legislation providing "that no person, believing in Christ Jesus, and living peaceably, and unoffensively, be by any penalty restrained from the quiet exercise of his conscience in his private house" so long as his conduct does not endanger the peace and safety of the state.³ Nor should the state permit the violation of the religious conscience by oaths designed to ferret out any man's private beliefs and opinions. The government should concern itself strictly with actions which are levelled against it and which may be fully and effectively punished by the sovereign authority which it possesses. The only test of good citizenship, the Catholic apologists submitted, should be loyalty of conduct and obedience to the civil laws of the nation, and to this requirement the English Catholics are happy to submit. They requested that the lives and properties of all those Romanists who had not waged war on Parliament should enjoy the protection of law and that such men shall be eligible for full participation in the public life of the nation.⁴ They asked that the distinction between Catholic and Protestant should disappear in politics and that the religious friction which had so grievously troubled England should be healed by a legally imposed toleration which emphasized the common Christianity that binds all the communions of the nation in a true spiritual unity too long obscured by partisan ambition and bigoted zeal.

The Catholic theory as developed by devoted and responsible lay leaders during the revolutionary era must be regarded

¹ *To the . . . committee for propagation of the gospel, the humble proposals of the Roman Catholicicks*, in [Austin], *Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned*, ii, 30.

² *No Papist nor Presbyterian*, 1-2.

³ *To the . . . committee for propagation of the gospel, the humble proposals of the Roman Catholicicks*, in [Austin], *Christian moderator: or, persecution for religion condemned*, ii, 31.

⁴ *No Papist nor Presbyterian*, 3.

as symptomatic of a profoundly important shift in the general character of English Catholic thought. It seems evident that the Roman communion, which did not in this period enjoy strong clerical leadership, had finally reconciled itself to the acceptance of a sectarian status. The responsible leaders realized that only by embracing this point of view could the Catholic faith hope to survive the severe repression and the general suspicion which had during the past two generations so gravely weakened it in numbers and influence. Hence English Catholicism espoused a policy precisely similar to that which Elizabeth had so clearly indicated was the price of its survival. Every responsible Catholic leader sought to emphasize the fact that the spiritual group at least had renounced without reservation the disquieting and seditious programme of the zealous missionary party—a programme that experience had demonstrated to be without any effective consequence save the imposition of ever heavier restraints upon the Catholic community. Catholicism in this period disavowed the view that martyrdom ensures the perpetuity of faith; it accepted with enthusiasm and sincerity the position that religious toleration affords a more certain, if less glorious, chance of survival. This persuasion had made necessary the accommodations in theory and policy which we have had occasion to stress. Catholicism stood ready in 1660 to assume those responsibilities which religious toleration demands of all communions. That it did not within a reasonable time receive the beneficent protection of legal toleration was the consequence, not of any demerit in Catholic thought, but of the fatal favour of the House of Stuart which at so many points in history weakened that which it desired to support, destroyed that which it sought to sustain.

IV

CONCLUSION

One of the most momentous changes in the history of English thought occurred during the exciting decades that intervened between the Henrician reformation and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. It may be suggested with assurance that at the time of the break with Rome, English thought on the complex questions related to the problem of religious toleration was thoroughly medieval save for intimations of an Erastian temper in the monarch and recurring indications of a widespread anti-clericalism. Men subscribed with complete devotion to an organic conception of the Christian life, which the incident of the Henrician revolution in the constitution of the Church weakened far less than has commonly been supposed. The heresy laws were still upon the statute books and were enforced with a restrained rigour which won the approval of a pious nation. For some decades an earnest and occasionally violent effort was directed towards securing in England a uniformity of thought which would preserve the fact as well as the fiction of catholicity. The nation was soon to be divided, it is true, between two hostile orthodoxies each of which laid claim to exclusive sovereignty over the souls of men, but there was only a slight weakening of the pretension to totality, whether from early Anglicanism or the retreating hosts of Rome. The Henrician reformation gained very little indeed for spiritual freedom save that it had been inspired principally by considerations of secular policy, and, as time was abundantly to demonstrate, the prince sets his sails and adapts his course with sensitive regard to the shifting winds of national advantage.

When the historian reflects upon the tenacity of traditional opinion, the conservatism inherent in habitual modes of thought, and the solidity of the Christian ideal of an organic and exclusive faith, the revolution that was to occur during the subsequent century and a half is all but incredible. It can be explained only by the fact that during the early modern

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period every incident in the gathering momentum of historical change conspired to weaken and then to demolish the ancient ideal of Christian life and organization. With the slow but irresistible weight of a glacier English thought began to move down the slopes of modern history, straining against and then levelling those granite peaks upon which for a thousand years the institutions of a Christian society had found stability and security. This grinding process of change came to its climax in the period of the Civil War, an era which was probably of greater significance in the history of thought than in the annals of politics. When the mighty forces released by that conflict had subsided into the partial equilibrium of the Restoration it was apparent, not only to the sensitive intelligence, but to the ordinary man as well, that the world would never be quite the same again. The contours of a new intellectual topography were clearly visible, and men, and the institutions which they create for the greater security of their souls and bodies, began rapidly to adapt themselves as they ever must to the mysterious and relentless realities of historical change.

The evidence which this work has examined¹ suggests that in 1660 the mass of men in England—what might be described as the centre of gravity of opinion—had conceded the case for religious toleration with very few reservations. This intensely revolutionary decision had to be taken, this momentous change in the history of thought had to be accomplished, in point of fact, before the stress and strain so evident in English history for rather more than a century could be ended. The conviction had gained strength in English thought that the ends of national life in the modern world could not be attained until the divisive and destructive energies of religious conflict had been tamed by toleration. This opinion was very generally entertained in the England of 1660.

We have examined with as much care as possible the slow process by which the stable, the pragmatic, and the unenthusiastic governing groups in England had arrived at this significant conclusion. We have observed that the patient and tolerant efforts of Cromwell to administer the explosive and divisive

¹ It should be said that this summary has in view the four volumes that comprise this work.

forces engendered by religious conflict added but a cubit of maturity to the solid and magnificently conceived structure of Elizabethan comprehension. We have noticed that the powerful middle classes were devoted with an intense conviction to the practical as well as the spiritual benefits of religious freedom. We have discovered that as we quarry deeper into the thought of the poor and inarticulate the stratum of tolerance runs firm and unbroken as far as the feeble tools of the historian can explore into the dark and tumbled mountains of the past. The intellectuals, who were first persuaded of the necessity of toleration, had by 1660 completed its theoretical justification. The great moderate mass of Anglican thought, ever the sturdy core of English opinion, stood persuaded of the inevitability and, indeed, of the desirability of some measure of religious liberty, a position which had been impressively expounded by the noble leaders of Anglican thought during the era of the Civil War. The sects, having contributed so much to the development of religious toleration by their stubborn refusal to be exterminated and having framed such persuasive arguments for the philosophical and spiritual right of dissent to exist, were firmly devoted to the cause of religious liberty.

It may be held, then, that the *theory* of religious toleration stood substantially complete in 1660 and, what is even more important, the sober and responsible thought of the nation stood convinced, in consequence of an extraordinary and complex concatenation of causes, of the necessity of translating into institutional terms the principles which England had accepted after so much travail and bitter historical experience. The temper of the nation had changed profoundly and decisively, though the necessary institutional adaptations were to require still another generation of patient and occasionally confused effort. The question of toleration had passed from the realm of theory to the arena of practical politics. The bitterness of political reaction during the first decade of the Restoration cannot obscure these facts. That the extremists within the Church of England gained a transitory control over the direction of religious policy was inevitable, for it is a law of history that progressive societies must yield their too advanced positions to reaction. But the royalism and the shrill Anglican-

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ism of the first years of the Restoration, which startled even the imperturbable Charles II, had no stronger basis than the inevitable vindictiveness of men whose personal sufferings had beclouded their vision and warped their political judgment. The case for religious toleration had been won by 1660; there remained only the difficult process of accommodating institutions to the fact of historical change.

It remains to analyse and assess the complex forces which, gaining in strength and fusing during the revolutionary era, accomplished by their total weight the profoundly significant change that we have endeavoured to trace in the climate of opinion. No change in the structure of ideas is easily estimated, and the slow momentum which finally revolutionized the stuff of a nation's thought in one of the most important areas of human life is particularly elusive and complex. The historian must remain humble at once before the immensity and the fragility of his evidence. The historian of ideas, at least, must ever realize that the careful fulness of his evidence represents but a tithe of the process of change; that a dozen works written in the heat of controversy, or a score of pamphlets indited by sectaries gripped by a blinding fear, may not, despite their dramatic intensity, be so significant as indices of the nature of cultural change as the cold verdict of a justice on assize, the casual quip of a Pepys, or the blunt observation of the squire to his lady. The historian who does not betray his craft must confine himself to an honest effort to portray as fully and as accurately as his method and materials permit the elusive and complex pattern of change; this accomplishment in itself embraces a wisdom, an artistry, and an honesty to which he can aspire with integrity of purpose if not with genius of accomplishment. The historian consequently undertakes the task of assessment, the responsibility of conclusions, with considerable trepidation and with the realization that his own judgments are quite as tinctured with subjective content as is the body of evidence which he has sought to examine with such cold analysis.

We may suggest, however, that numerous and diverse forces, engendered by different causes and arising at different times—forces which rose like rivulets from many springs in the

various contours of national life--were during the seventeenth century joined to form a mighty torrent of change that cut for itself a new course and came to water the fruitful valley in which men lived and built with such security for some two centuries. These rivulets of thought we have endeavoured to trace in their tortuous course through the tangled terrain of history. We have analysed and have sought to assess the contributions of the various religious and lay groups that comprised the thought of articulate England; we have endeavoured to examine and estimate the contributions of individual men whose thought possessed peculiar strength and who influenced slightly, but none the less perceptibly, the slow evolution of thought. We shall now seek to differentiate for brief estimate the numerous forces which in their totality accounted for the development of religious toleration in England.

A. THE SECULAR FORCES

It seems probable that religious toleration was gained in England principally in consequence of the decision of laymen that secular purposes would be most certainly attained by employing it as an instrument for the quieting of the chronic and ruinous struggle of a number of grimly determined orthodoxies to achieve mastery in the religious and political life of the nation.

The most compelling of the numerous lay influences from which toleration was to spring was the conviction of political necessity. The history of the sixteenth century in England was posited upon the steady desire of a people to secure the benefits of strong government; the seventeenth century was characterized by the adaptation of political and administrative strength to the requirements of a rapidly maturing political and economic life within the nation. This process of historical change profoundly modified, when it did not destroy, numerous institutional survivals from the Middle Ages. In no other area, however, was the demand for strength of administration and assurance of order to operate quite as effectively as in that of religion. The organic ideal of the Middle Ages, the generally

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entertained persuasion that uniformity of belief and profession were inseparably connected with the good national life, were sacrificed when it became apparent that these ideals could not be translated into actuality in the modern world without a perilous risk of social and political disintegration. Men came in the closing years of the sixteenth century to be concerned not so much with the good life as with the secure life. The Elizabethan policy implemented this most significant transformation of opinion; the theorists who contemplated the ruin wrought by a civil war, itself animated by religion, lent it decisive confirmation two generations later. Quixotic idealism was abandoned for the more substantial benefits of the orderly administration of law, security of life and property, and an enlarged circumference of individual activity.

The greatest of all English sovereigns with a sure and gifted sense of realities translated these trends in national life into institutional terms by the enduring settlement of the national church in 1559. This settlement, whatever glosses fertile theory might contrive, was Erastian, and, save for the unhappy interlude of Laud, the Erastian realities were never again renounced. The Elizabethan Church was defined with a large and tolerant comprehensiveness, not so much because the government viewed faith with the magnanimity of a Falkland or a Taylor, as because it had determined to include all reasonable men within that generous circumference and to convict religious opposition either of stubborn singularity or of seditious interest masked in the guise of faith. This steady reference of the religious question to the requirements of "statism" was never again absent from English political thinking and administrative policy. The case for religious toleration was, fundamentally, all but won during the reign of Elizabeth, though it was to require very nearly a century for men to test at the shrine of their own faith and intelligence the wisdom of a decision born of political necessity.

The English Reformation, then, was directed and disciplined by a lay intelligence which did not exhibit the enthusiasm or surrender itself to the fanatical determination that characterized the progress of the religious struggle in most of Western Europe. The initial direction in which the Reformation had been im-

pelled and the historical circumstances which governed its development in England spared the nation the tragic ruin that accompanied the collision of armed and rigid fanaticisms in most European countries. Civilization—the social and political organism of a continent—was very nearly engulfed during a full century of insensate conflict which was not resolved until the fires of extremism had burned themselves out. The Erastian wisdom of England was richly confirmed as a sobered nation contemplated the fate which it had so narrowly escaped. The literature that we have examined, whether from lay or sectarian pens, vividly reflects the salutary effect which the continental debacle was to exercise in the moulding of English opinion.

The political necessity for religious toleration was further confirmed by the rude fact that the nation was itself now divided by irreconcilable religious differences. It required cool, capable, and resolute government indeed to hold in tight rein a social structure which threatened to burst under the terrific centrifugal strain of rival sectarian pretensions and ambitions. On two occasions, in the reign of Mary Tudor and in the reign of Charles Stuart, the precious balance was lost when the government itself inclined towards the support of one faction or the other. The persecutions of Mary opened up to frightened men the terrible vista of a nation broken upon the wheel of fanaticism. The result was that systematic persecution of heresy was never again a political or philosophical possibility in English life. The inept policy of the Stuarts resulted in the momentary loss of sovereign control by the civil government, with the consequence that for a brief season sectarian bigotry and the bitter rivalry of opposed orthodoxies engulfed the nation. It was in this circumstance that Englishmen of all persuasions found themselves united in the firm conviction that mastery must be restored to the civil state. This powerful sentiment accounts as much for the solid support which Cromwell ultimately gained as for the almost automatic cession of power to Charles II following the Protector's death.

England had come to realize that the organic ideal of religious life, whatever merit it may have possessed in theory, could not possibly be attained in the modern world within the limits of safe and prudent politics. It would seem evident that Elizabeth

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entertained this opinion, since she was concerned rather with the political aspects of uniformity than with propriety of belief; certainly, it was generally comprehended in the next century when men gained a taste of the meaning of the words which the orthodox prated with such fanatical sincerity. Diversity had become rooted in England and only a short trial demonstrated that it could not be extirpated without destroying the fabric of national life. A new concept of the nation was rapidly framed. Political loyalty and civil obedience replaced religious propriety as the prime test of good citizenship. The government could ask no more than this because it could not, without endangering itself, secure more. And time was to show, almost too convincingly, that political sovereignty had armed itself with sufficiently strong resources. Political necessity brought England to the threshold of religious liberty in a progress that was slow, careful, and deliberate. History had compelled England to accommodate herself to the requirements of a new age, and that which history compels, the theorist soon explains.

The secular forces which were uniting upon the principles of religious toleration were assisted, secondly, by the very rapid growth of rationalism and scepticism in the intellectual life of England. We have sought to trace as carefully as possible the development of this temper of mind, which was so powerfully to call into question the moral integrity of orthodox pretensions and so savagely to attack the aspirations of successive systems of absolute truth to order the spiritual life of the nation. We have indicated that rationalism struck its roots in the hospitable soil of Elizabethan England, flourished during the troubled reigns of the early Stuarts, and came to permeate large sections of English thought during the revolutionary era. The bitterness of the sects, the tragic futility of persecution, and the absurdity of sectarian pretensions when taken in their totality, drove many men of sensitive spirit and powerful intelligence to grasp sceptical weapons which were wielded with decisive effect against a preoccupied and embattled orthodoxy. Criticism became ever sharper and more intense. The objectivity of the sceptic afforded him a powerful and almost unassailable vantage point of criticism by enabling him to exploit to his advantage the mutually contradictory claims of the sects.

These men were to exercise a very significant influence in the shaping of modern thought; certainly the intellectual temper of the period of the Restoration may be said to have been sketched by their incisive pens. By their assaults upon the intolerant arrogance of the sects they weakened as well the vitality of Protestant Christianity and, almost incidentally, the intolerance which had been the concomitant of that vitality. These thinkers were laymen who desired to create a world dominated by the lay intelligence and directed towards the solid ends comprehensible to the lay mind. They repudiated without evidence of nostalgia the last and most tenacious of the great ideals of the Middle Ages and summoned the modern world to follow them along paths whose destination is even now uncertain. These men challenged the seventeenth century to face the future confident in the capacity of human reason to solve human problems. An orthodoxy that had exhausted itself in internecine conflicts of fatal intensity found in 1660 that leadership had passed to strong, confident, yet naïve hands.

Very closely connected with the rise of rationalism and scepticism, and probably more important for the development of religious toleration, was the increasing vigour of anti-clerical sentiment. This is particularly important when we reflect that repudiation of clerical leadership may come very close indeed to a disavowal of religion itself. We have observed strong evidences of anti-clerical feeling in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. This sentiment became much more pronounced during the Laudian period and increased to an amazing intensity during the two decades of revolution. Anti-clerical sentiment tintured the thought of all the lay groups. It was particularly pronounced, however, in the sects, which speedily outgrew their clerical leadership. Anti-clericalism was inspired by numerous and complex motives, but it was to be fanned into a consuming flame during the Civil Wars when it became apparent that England had escaped from the yoke of prelacy only to find itself endangered by the straiter discipline of Presbyterianism. A deep-seated and a widespread distrust of clerical integrity was thereby engendered which had the effect of securing in a critical period the repudiation of clerical leadership in the intellectual and religious life of the nation.

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The disavowal of clerical leadership by large segments of national opinion was not only to weaken fatally the strength of orthodox pretensions but was to lead to the development of a kind of lay Christianity which accepted as its first principle the doctrine of religious liberty. The discussion and the solution of religious problems were wrested from the hands of the clergy with an almost brutal violence; spiritual decisions of very great importance were taken by laymen who were careless of both doctrinal and institutional consequences.¹ We have dwelt at length on the quality and significance of this lay Christianity which broke so sharply from the traditional and formal pattern of orthodox thought. In an historical sense, in fact, it was Christian only in so far as religious expression undefined by precision of doctrine and undisciplined by institutional direction can be so regarded. The triumph of the lay intelligence was to change permanently the structure of modern culture, and it was powerfully to implement those forces which sought to secure for mankind the precious benefits of religious liberty.

It is likewise apparent that religious indifference became for the first time widespread in England during the last decade of the revolutionary era. This most powerful dissolvent of religious zeal was to be a factor of very great importance in the development of religious toleration. The indifferent man is tolerant of all religions because he lends his devotion to none. The substance of English thought underwent an amazing transformation in the middle decades of the seventeenth century, and one of the most significant evidences of this change was the contagious spread of indifference. We have endeavoured to indicate that in all of the lay groups this was a factor of great importance in determining the quality and direction of secular thought. Indifference is, indeed, the most deadly opponent of zealous faith; it offers no front which may be attacked; it

¹ In this connection the religious works published in 1630 and 1631, available in the McAlpin Collection (New York) and in the Huntington Library, were consulted. Of the 136 titles examined, 92 % were written by clergymen, 8 % by laymen. Some 200 religious works published in 1656, including anonymous pamphlets that could be identified, were consulted. Of these 68 % were apparently written by clergymen, many of whom were sectaries of lay origin, and 32 % by laymen. The statistical evidence for this transition of leadership, while impressive, by no means conveys the quality and significance of the change.

declines to join with an issue which it does not even recognize. Religious indifference spread like a low, creeping fog across the terrain of thought to damp down and then to quench the fires of bigotry and zeal. Indifference sprang, in the main, from diverse sources which we have sought to examine with some care. It never amassed itself into a system of thought, remaining essentially negative, though it left the fabric of faith gravely weakened in 1660.

It would appear, indeed, that religious indifference was the residuum left after the incandescent fires of orthodoxy had burned themselves out. That zeal which the fanaticism of certainty inspires must in time consume itself. England had been gripped for a full century by an amazing theological preoccupation, had been ravaged by bitter dogmatic controversies that had gravely endangered the stability which all men desired. This tendency, as we have seen, had called into being a powerful secular resistance. When it became apparent during the Interregnum that the result of the religious preoccupation was to be not the delineation of the circumference of truth but the disintegration of society, a profound reaction set in which was decisively to influence the temper of the nation for a century and a half. England was stricken in 1660 with religious ennui; the nation was bored with endless theological discussion, and was indifferent to those battle-cries which had so recently brought a divided people to arms. An inevitable "relativism," a profound indifference, was the bitter fruit of too many exclusive systems of truth, of too many definitions of heresy, of too many mutually contradictory designs for the Kingdom of God.

In reviewing all of the evidence underlying the slow evolution of religious toleration we are impressed by the fact that still another attitude of mind was of great importance in the attainment of religious liberty. When one takes into view the long period which this work has sought to survey, it seems apparent that very considerable gains had been made in terms of human decency, that men had come to be animated by an increasing sensitivity to human pain and suffering. This significant and obscure development, which deserves the attention of the social psychologist, was to have beneficent consequences

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in all areas of human relationships, but it contributed most immediately and notably to the rise of religious toleration. It might be suggested, indeed, that the history of culture can in one sense be interpreted in terms of the rising and falling curve of man's sensitivity to cruelty and of his reaction to needless suffering. There was in religious persecution a very considerable and a very ugly psychological and moral element which must be described as sadism. Innate barbarism relieved and justified itself by the infliction of suffering for what was conceived as a moral end. During our period, it seems clear, the mass of men in England came to make a very sharp and important distinction between punishment imposed for the judicially demonstrable fact of crime and the infliction of punishment for the retention of opinion. This must be regarded as one of the most significant cultural gains in human history. These gains of the human race are painfully and slowly attained and they may be lost before the mass of men realize that they are threatened. Brutality and sadism are deeply rooted in man's nature. They are restrained by no surer sanction than a decent attitude towards the fact of difference, which man's biological nature apparently teaches him to abhor but which his history has taught him he must respect in the interests of sheer survival.

In one sense this study has sought to trace the slow development of this attitude of decency. It was at best an incomplete gain but it was real and demonstrable. We have observed that until well after the middle of the sixteenth century the theory of persecution for the attainment of moral as well as social ends was generally entertained in the Protestant world. In England the calculated and nicely balanced destruction of Catholic and Protestant radicals was, if not generally applauded, at least unquestioned save by those who shared the beliefs of the man who had been done to death. There is overwhelming evidence that the brutal and indiscriminate persecutions undertaken by Mary Tudor seared the public conscience and brought England to a shocked realization of what religious bigotry can mean in human terms. Elizabeth enormously assisted this development by allowing political necessity to shape the extent of her repression and by scrupulously confining her wrath to

the bounds set by the law of treason. Elizabeth was ever moved by politics and not by piety; her courts dealt with facts and not with opinions. Her Erastian control of the religious emotion was strait and it could be merciless, but she and her advisers made it sharply clear that her government was concerned with actions held to be criminal, not with beliefs deemed to be erroneous. There was no moral content in Elizabethan persecution, a fact which, ironically enough, was to be contributory to a very great moral gain in the history of culture.

We have observed that the execution, itself probably illegal, of Wightman and Legate for heresy in the time of James I was the last instance in English history of the infliction of the death penalty for a strictly religious offence. Though these men were unquestionably heretical by the common consent of the important religious groups of the period, their execution was vigorously condemned by every writer who dealt with the case. We know enough about the details to be sure, moreover, that the reaction of the mass of men was sharply critical and ominously restive. The infliction of the death penalty, even for the most flagrant heresies, enjoyed no support in the public conscience of England in 1612. The vast controversial literature after 1640, inspired and embittered by a truly desperate religious struggle, reveals only a half-dozen extremists who would even theoretically punish heresy by death, and only a score or so who would restrain it by effective corporal pains. The moral conviction which girds the sword of persecution had failed in England; the steely spine of persecution had at last been broken.

B. THE RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL FORCES

It is not easy and is perhaps not desirable to seek to differentiate too precisely the religious influences which added their weight to the historical dynamic that ultimately secured religious toleration in England. Secular and religious considerations and motives were often intermingled in the same man and in the same group. We have observed that the laity wrenched the discussion and solution of the religious problem

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from clerical hands during the era of the Civil Wars and it has been noticed that the secular thinkers dealt with the ancient and complex problems that are related to the question of religious toleration with a rough and occasionally destructive pragmatism. Yet it must be emphasized that deeply pious men evolved during the period under examination a theory of religious toleration drawn from the substance of religion. This salutary adaptation of the exclusive character of historical Christianity was, it should be stressed, the condition for the survival of the Protestant movement, itself subject to the centrifugal forces with which it was instinct.

Perhaps the most important of the religious influences underlying the development of toleration was the rapid decay of the medieval ideal of an organic spiritual society during the decades under consideration. The emergence of Protestantism dealt the first and, as time was to show, the ultimately mortal blow to this noble conception of a Christian society, however much the various Protestant groups tended with varying degrees of tenacity to lay claim to an exclusive capacity which Rome alone could urge with logical consistency. It became dramatically apparent during the reign of Mary that unanimity of faith and profession in England could not be secured again save by an awful propitiation of blood which would certainly endanger the fabric of the state and very possibly destroy the spiritual essence of religion as well. Even the abler of Mary's Catholic advisers realized that when once the sacred vessel of catholicity is broken it can scarcely be restored with the faulty cement of repression—and no other cement was available to any religious group in England that dreamed of an exclusive dominance.

These facts Elizabeth instinctively accepted as axiomatic in the formulation and administration of her astute religious policy. It should be borne in mind that the queen displayed but very slight concern with religious theory. She required for political reasons and out of consideration for administrative regularity a reasonable uniformity of religious profession which she, quite as clearly as Hobbes, realized has little or nothing to do with uniformity of faith. She was not concerned with propriety of belief because she knew very little about its

meaning and because she was wise enough to understand that any government which seeks to press thought into a rigid mould risks the solid elements of its sovereignty. The organic ideal was accordingly ruthlessly abandoned save for the shell of administrative uniformity which she felt might be converted to an essentially political use. Religious and political necessity were conjoined to destroy one of the noblest of the ideals that have inspired the minds of men.

The organic concept, which can alone supply moral conviction to a system of persecution, was further weakened by the slow decay of certain notions that had been inherently part of Protestant thought. Deep in English Protestantism was the conviction that truth would in the end assert itself by the force of its own transcendent clarity, that sound preaching and the universal reading of holy writ would in due time effect amongst all men a unity of truth and faith. This persuasion relaxed the repressive vigilance of Protestantism until it became rudely apparent that the consequence had been instead a fractionization of the corpus of Protestant doctrine and thought which, contrary to the expectations of piety, showed no indication whatsoever of attaining unity. Protestantism, itself founded on the principle of the right of private judgment, did not enjoy the logical or the moral capacity permanently to deny to the many sects which were sloughing off its main trunk that liberty which men had been too well taught to regard as the fundamental spiritual prerogative upon which their hope of salvation depended. Thus the strength of Protestantism was vitiated by the centrifugal dynamic inherent in it. Sectarianism spread apace until it became impossible in the end to say with any exactitude what was and what was not Protestant truth. The sword of persecution had been relinquished; the state had come through the bitter tuition of history to deny its responsibility for the attainment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Pious men were comforted by the observation that diversity had not, as had been so gloomily predicted, destroyed the essence of faith, nor had heresy weakened the vitality of religion. Many religious thinkers during the revolutionary decades arrived at the new and significant conclusion that sectarian diversity and heresy itself might actually possess

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efficacy in inspiring vitality of faith, in obliging every Christian and every sect to define the articles of belief with precision and to live uprightly before the world in evidence of faith. A society which was becoming actively competitive consoled itself by pointing to the advantages which would accrue to religion from a now settled diversity of profession. Furthermore, men who had repudiated an older concept of unity were able to insist that Christendom might after all be bound by the common objective of securing for each human being a measurable degree of rectitude in this life—that morality might in the mysterious process of God's will be the best security against the life to come. These were cold, wholly pragmatic, and essentially lay rationalizations with which men sought to fill the vacuum left in their souls and in their institutions by the disappearance of the medieval ideal of Christian unity before the historical necessity of religious toleration.

It should be emphasized, secondly, that the very rapid deterioration of Protestant orthodoxy during the period under review contributed importantly to the development of religious toleration. We have repeatedly stressed the fact that persecution is an attribute of the "church concept" rather than of the "sect concept." In order to possess the moral capacity, the tenacity of purpose, and the spiritual strength requisite for persecution, which if it is to be effective must flow from a moral persuasion rather than from caprice, a religious communion must regard itself as seised with an exclusive, an exactly defined, and an infallible body of truth to which all men must adhere if they are to attain salvation. Of all the reformed faiths, Calvinism alone possessed the intellectual and moral possibility of becoming a Church in the historical and philosophical meaning of that term. We have observed that it was afflicted with no nostalgia for the ancient faith; it alone met frontally the full weight of the Counter-Reformation; it alone possessed a logical and a complete metaphysics; and it alone had attained a precise and a powerful formulation of doctrine which it expounded with a fanaticism born of certainty. Calvinism was *the* Church of the Protestant movement.

England, however, because of historical reasons which we have examined with some care, was never completely won by

Calvinism. During the reign of Elizabeth the Church of England was more Calvinistic than some of its modern apologists care to remember, but for many reasons, in the main political, neither she nor her successor dared permit Calvinism to express itself through the administrative and disciplinary media necessary to the fulfilment of its ethic. Calvinism was in the meantime first mortally weakened by the Arminian controversy in Holland, which had the final result of permanently eroding those pillars of doctrinal certainty upon which both its intolerance and its remarkable vitality depended. We have sought to show that the Arminian movement had far-reaching consequences in England during the generation preceding the outbreak of the Civil War. The Latitudinarians, the moderates, the rationalists, and at least two of the sects were sapping at the core of orthodoxy long before the Scots gained the opportunity to bestow upon England the advantages of an infallible faith. The peculiar historical complex which afforded undiluted Calvinism its one opportunity in England came just one generation too late. There was very little dissent from the major principles of Calvinistic dogma in 1640, but when England discovered what was comprehended in the proposal to translate purity of dogma into purity of discipline a profound and explosive reaction occurred which permanently blasted the possibility for Presbyterianism or any other orthodoxy to rivet an infallible religious system upon the nation. We have seen that English religious thought underwent a revolutionary transformation in which the substantial doctrinal unanimity of 1640 was torn into innumerable fragments of private and sectarian belief. In this final stage of doctrinal deterioration active intolerance became a factual impossibility and religious toleration became a spiritual quite as truly as a political necessity.

We may suggest, furthermore, that the convincing fact of religious diversity imposed a spiritual necessity of religious liberty quite as persuasively as it suggested the political necessity for the legal toleration of orderly dissent. We have repeatedly observed in this study that theory slowly but inevitably accommodates itself to historical reality. The factual existence of deeply rooted dissent from any conceivable establishment that might be erected in England was a reality which

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only a criminal and irresponsible fanaticism could deny. Diversity had confirmed its right to exist by the mere fact of existence. For a full century disabilities of varying severity had been laid against dissent, but by 1660 it was patent that sectarianism had grown steadily in spite of, and many men thought because of, a repression that had on occasion amounted to persecution. It was probably absurd to talk of an exclusive religious communion in England after James had taken his momentous decision at Hampton Court; certainly it was both absurd in religion and extremely dangerous in politics after 1640.

It was but slowly that the various religious groups in England divested themselves of the philosophy and the terminology which they had inherited from an earlier age. We can have nothing but sympathy with men who still sought the vision of a complete truth, of an unbroken unity, and a spotless Kingdom of God. But such men, though animated by lofty sentiments, did their own communions and religion in general a grave disservice when they declined to admit that Protestantism in England had been broken into many fragments each of which was disposed to arrogate the title of Christian to itself. In these circumstances pious zeal lay vulnerable to the jests of the sceptical, to the barbed logic of the rationalists, and to the cold indifference of the mass of men who had found themselves too often betrayed by the cry, "Here is the Truth." So profound was the religious anarchy of the revolutionary era that the individual judgment had become sovereign in spiritual matters. The sects had gained greatly in strength of numbers, in maturity of philosophy, and in that social respectability which is of such great importance in the attainment of the capacity for survival. We have noticed that every religious communion in England, not excluding the Roman Catholics, had by 1660 been driven by spiritual necessity to admit that some measure of religious toleration alone could cure the problems which the fact of firmly rooted diversity had created. There was still disagreement concerning the methods by which religious toleration could be secured, there was wide difference concerning the area of its circumference, but there were very few men who did not admit that it was necessary for the survival of religion as well as for the preservation of the civil society.

It may be suggested, in the next place, that one of the most significant of the philosophical contributions to the development of religious toleration was the fruitful extension of the comprehensive ideal so nobly developed by the great Elizabethan apologists for the Church of England. This lofty conception of the Christian society, which traced its origin to the humanistic ideal of the Church, was to receive its richest and most mature development in England. The great Latitudinarian thinkers of the seventeenth century, building squarely upon the sound Elizabethan foundations, sought with convincing logic and rare objectivity to show that Christian doctrines could and must be reduced to a few fundamentals upon which all churches could agree. They distrusted intricacy of dogma quite as much as they disliked rigidity of creed and they subtly suggested that, since the saving truths must be self-evident, the fundamentals must by definition consist of those essential beliefs to which all churches professed devotion. Hence they were able to regard sectarian dissensions as nothing more than variations on the same theme, as an almost instinctive disposition to enlarge the area of known truth. Thus they discovered spiritual unity in the midst of an unseemly and dangerous clamour over trifles that relate not at all to the central message or the ultimate meaning of Christianity.

In this view persecution was the most hideous of all crimes, since it involved the repression of one Christian by another. These thinkers opposed morality to dogmatic rigidity and sought to persuade England that no man could proceed farther or faster than his reason permitted without doing violence to his own integrity. They posed the individual reason as the ultimate authority in religion and maintained with fine consistency that when reason is violated religion itself is destroyed. Few philosophers have ever entertained a higher view of human nature; few religious thinkers have ever bestowed upon the human soul so complete a sovereignty and so precious an integrity. Their charity extended to all men and to all creeds. Their religious thought discarded as without significant meaning the endless controversies and the infallible dicta which bigotry had reared as a prop to its essential weakness and timidity. In the thought of the Latitudinarians the inherent individualism of Protestant-

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ism was reduced to its final terms. Theirs was a philosophical conception, not untinged with scepticism, which bore with great relevancy upon the religious situation of their generation. They evolved an almost pure theory of toleration from purely religious sources, though in so doing they all but destroyed the integrity and the sovereignty of those institutions which had through all of Christian history disciplined and directed the religious emotion.

Closely related to Latitudinarian thought was a much larger and more influential body of religious opinion which may be described as moderate in temper. The moderates, of whatever party, looked with ever-increasing suspicion upon the rigorous courses of orthodoxy and lent a firm and effective devotion to the principles of religious toleration. This very large, though somewhat amorphous, body of thought drew its intellectual support from the brilliant discussions of the Latitudinarians and their successors, but derived its peculiar strength from the tuition which the history of religious rigour and sectarian bigotry had afforded the nation.

It is highly significant that the moderate religious temper actually gained steadily in strength during the revolutionary era. We have indicated that important evidences of the moderate persuasion may be observed in every religious and lay group during the twenty eventful years that followed the convention of the Long Parliament. The orthodox ranks of Presbyterianism were weakened and then split by the defection of a liberal wing animated by moderate and conciliatory convictions; Anglicanism, following the collapse of the Laudian leadership, evolved a new and noble definition which elevated the principle of moderation into a tolerant and catholic theory of the Church; and English Catholicism was evidently considerably influenced by the gentle persuasion of the moderate spirit.

There was a peculiar tragedy inherent in the English Civil War. It was a war incited and sustained by religious extremisms, despite the fact that England was in 1640 staunchly though moderately Anglican and remained so throughout the decades of revolutionary experiment. The fanaticism which provoked and prosecuted the war, and the scarcely less destructive religious controversies which were its concomitant, were in the

end reduced and tamed by the moderate counsels that had been ignored and defied in 1642. The cure which the moderates offered was quite as salutary in 1640 as in 1660. But then as ever the great moderate (centrist) body of thought, which comprehended the sane and responsible elements of opinion, possessed neither leadership nor organization, was inspired by no battle-cries, and was unequipped to meet with the rational strength inherent to it the irrational pretensions of bigotry. The moderate tradition cannot, it seems, discover weapons for its own defence without accomplishing as a derivative of the action its own self-destruction. Yet within the moderate temper the steady core of history is contained and the hope of human progress and decency has ever resided.

When rival fanaticisms in England had destroyed themselves by the fury of self-expended energy, when the cutting edges of bigotry had been ground away by direct and steady erosion against other equally determined bigotries, an exhausted and disillusioned England crept back to the capacious and reasonable conception of national and religious life which the moderates had maintained with quiet courage and sane conviction during a period of institutional stress that really had its beginning in the reign of Elizabeth. This moderate temper, compounded of many elements, had hardened under the duress of history into a philosophy of national and religious life. That philosophy which we describe as moderate was the low-storied but staunchly girded architecture to which the modern world was compelled when the design for the soaring edifice of the Kingdom of God had of necessity to be abandoned. Surely the animating principle which underlay the new philosophy of the state and of social organization was religious toleration. Its aims were not lofty, its temper not exalted, its pretensions neither dramatic nor infallible, but it was to gain for human society rather more than two centuries in which life was to be secure, decency of instinct and action to be prized, and the common lot of mankind to be vastly bettered. The moderate temper was to make a rich and vastly significant contribution to the annals of human progress; those who abandon its cool and pragmatic counsels for the persuasions of new and infallible bigotries that sketch with calculated skill the design

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of a new Jerusalem do so at the peril of an awful judgment of history.

It should be emphasized, finally, that the slow development of religious liberty was very greatly assisted by the appearance in many individuals and in some sects of the principle of pure tolerance. Complete tolerance, we have previously reflected, is normally the attribute of the sceptical man whose magnanimity proceeds rather from dispassion than from the persuasion of faith. But during the period under examination, and particularly during the last two decades of the era, an inherently religious and surely a more noble conception of tolerance was to make its appearance. Complete tolerance involves very difficult psychological and philosophical adaptations indeed for the Christian conscience which historically has viewed with equanimity neither the devouring spread of heresy nor the awful peril in which the lost soul stands. Historically, therefore, Christianity has tended to be intolerant as a condition of its institutional vitality and has sought to draw with precision the line which separates the hosts of error from the thinner ranks of the regenerate. Hence the rise of a theory of pure tolerance, defined as an attribute of Christianity, involved not only personal but philosophical and institutional adaptations of very great significance in the history of the Christian faith.

We have observed, in summary, that religious toleration developed principally from historical causes not closely related to religion, not directed in fact to the attainment of religious objectives. It must be emphasized as well that toleration was powerfully and automatically assisted by the profoundly important deterioration which Protestantism underwent during the middle decades of the seventeenth century. Religious toleration resulted from the fusing of complex and diverse causes directly the religious preoccupation, which had for so long dominated human thought and conduct, gave way before new and powerful secular interests. But this development was accompanied and stimulated by the rise of a theory of pure tolerance within certain areas of the now disrupted body of Christian thought. The many thinkers who warmly defended a pure theory of religious liberty did so, it must be emphasized, not because spiritual freedom was expedient and necessary, but

because, in their view, it was an essential attribute of Christianity. This conception of Christian life was of course intensely individualistic and could arise only after the "sect view" of religious conduct and spiritual institutions had replaced the "church ideal." Directly the medieval ideal of an organic church had been abandoned, a philosophy of pure tolerance was possible within the broad confines of what could be described as Christianity. We have seen that this disposition involved a fundamental reconsideration of the entire structure of Christian thought and a revolutionary repudiation of all dogmatic rigidity. As a consequence of this momentous adaptation a new and firm basis was secured for sectarian development, the centrifugal tendencies inherent in Protestantism were accorded reasonable explanation, and adequate scope was extended to the individual conscience. Grave injury had been done, however, to the strength and integrity of Christian institutions which had for so many centuries disciplined the spirit and governed the religious institutions of mankind. Man was left free by the triumph of religious toleration, but he stood terribly alone upon the slender integrity of his own puny reason and the wavering uncertainty of his own ethical judgment. It remained for time to determine whether he would gain strength, nobility, and high courage from the freedom with which he stood endowed or whether he would be entrapped and enthralled by new fanaticisms and colder barbarisms, uninspired even by morality of purpose. History had poised itself for the trial of the integrity of the individual reason.

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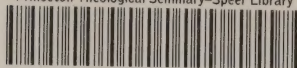
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